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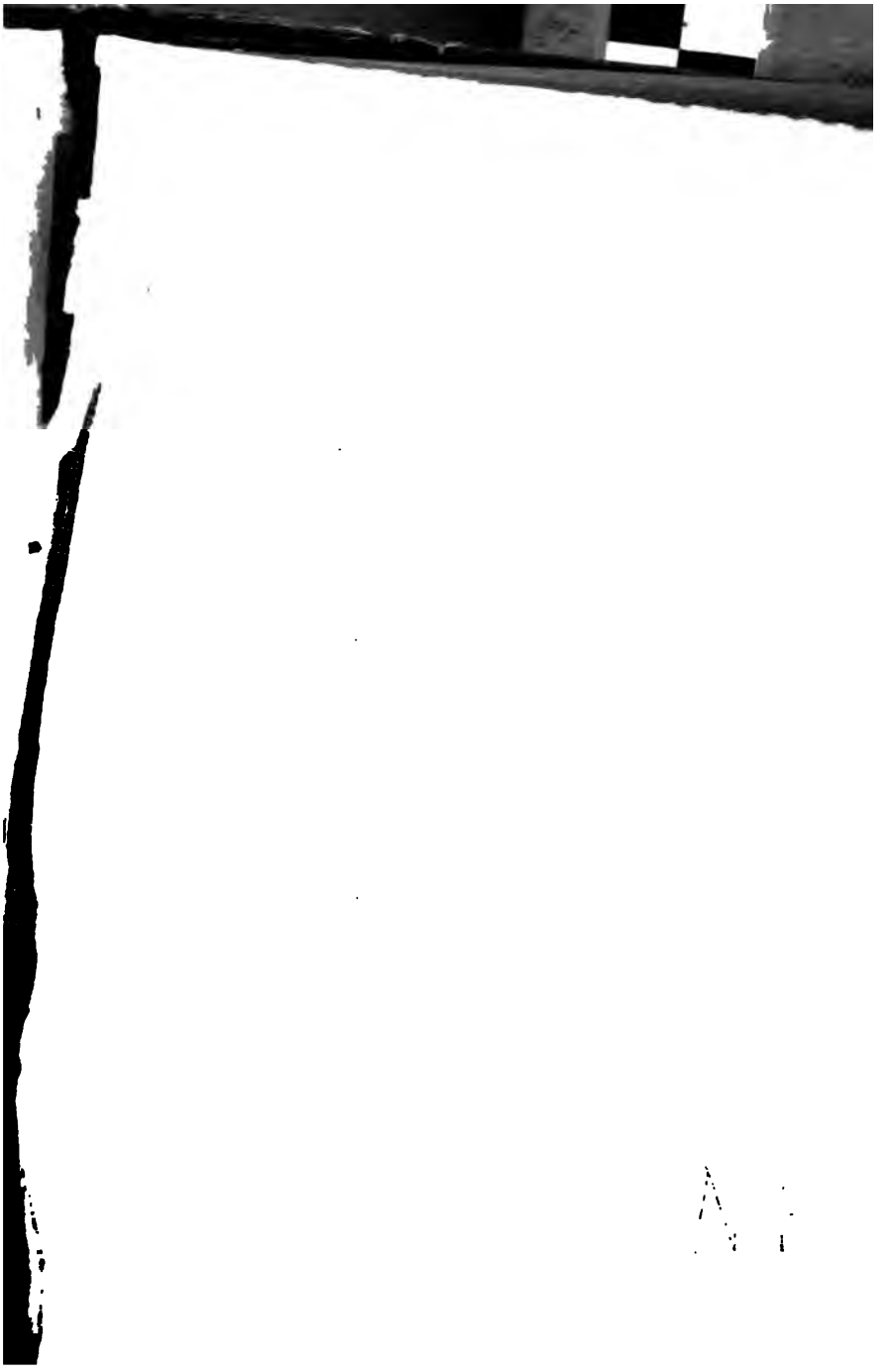
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THE HEART OF DESIRE

By ELIZABETH DEJEANS

THE
WINNING CHANCE

AN AMERICAN NOVEL

"Big with Vitality and Power"

"Mrs. Dejeans has done a finer bit of psychology than the author has done in 'The Inner Shrine.' The book is more dramatic."

—*Los Angeles Times.*

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AS THE MAN'S HEAD APPEARED SHE ROSE SLOWLY

Page 163

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By

ELIZABETH DEJEANS

AUTHOR OF "THE WINNING CHANCE"

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS IN COLOR BY

THE KINNEYS

PHILADELPHIA & LONDON

J. B. LIPPINCOTT COMPANY

1910

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BOOK I





THE HEART OF DESIRE

I.

RESEMBLANCES

IT was with a sense of relief that Horton Payne hung up his damp overcoat and disposed of his umbrella. Even the stuffy red plush seat and the air of the smoky over-heated car were preferable to the clammily-cold atmosphere without. He had walked a block in the half-frozen slush, and he lifted first one and then the other of his well-shod feet, inspecting their damp soles. "Not wet through," was his comment.

The December twilight had fallen earlier than usual, for the dark clouds of foggy smoke had hung low over the city all day, shutting out the sickly, discouraged sun, and wrapping everything in a pall of gloom. Horton had had plenty of time to catch his train, but he had hurried to be out of the damp chill. The fog had invaded the huge station and mingled with the smoke belched from a dozen clanging engines. The station lights gleamed and twinkled dully in the murky haze, and the lanterns of the brakemen bobbed aimlessly about in it. Hurrying groups made their way up and down the platform, and the voice of the

station-crier bawled the destination of outgoing trains. Horton congratulated himself that he was leaving it all—the murk, and the dirt, and the cold; his mind held another vision.

The car was filling rapidly with men, and Horton gathered as he listened to the scraps of conversation about him that most of his travelling companions had mining interests and were bound for northern points on the Pacific Coast. He remembered that his morning paper had told him of the special car bound over the southern route with a generous allowance of stop-offs in California. Most of the men about him appeared to be the overflow from this special car, and Horton reflected that he would have the crowd and chatter throughout his entire journey. Damp umbrellas were strewn about, dress-suit cases littered the aisle and the seats, and one or two of the louder voiced were characterizing the weather in no gentle terms. There was a laughing skirmish for seats, and lively comments on upper and lower berths, and Horton turned his attention from the commotion around him to the fog-soaked platform.

The train on the next track was slowly pulling out, and a faint vibration in his own announced that it was about to follow. "All aboard," roared the hoarse voice, and they had begun to move when suddenly in the gloom under his window appeared two running figures. Horton had a glimpse of the gilt in the

conductor's cap as it passed beneath him, and presently, when they were moving more rapidly, well under way, he entered with the belated passenger. She was a young girl, very quietly dressed in black, a heavy black veil thrown back from her face. As she leaned against Horton's seat while the conductor ejected an overcoat and two portmanteaus from the seat opposite, he could plainly hear her gasping breath and see the trembling of her whole body. She looked white and exhausted after her run, and the light overhead showed a line of moisture on her lip and brow. She stood with lowered eyes, and Horton Payne's artistic sense took instant note of the almost perfect oval of her face, the beautiful arch and curve of her well-marked eyebrows, and the dark line of her long lashes. The contour of her face reminded him even at the first glance of features he had seen and admired before, but he failed to place them.

He was staring at her intently, half puzzled, half interested, when she turned her head and looked down directly into his eyes, a look weary and indifferent, that flashed into an expression startled almost to the verge of terror, merging the next instant into a level look of scorn. She straightened herself abruptly, and taking her hand from his seat, turned her back on him. He felt a rush of hot blood to his cheeks, for his interest had been involuntary and beyond his control, and by no means an intentional rudeness. He

knew the moment her eyes met his, that whatever the fancied resemblance, he had certainly never seen her before.

The conductor had seated her. "Wait here a while," he said, "and I'll come back and look up your berth for you—the car's crowded."

"But I have no berth," she returned, in a low voice. "I almost missed the train as it was—I thought I could get it on the train."

"No berth engaged!" exclaimed the conductor. "Why there's not a lower on the train, and precious few uppers. Haven't you a ticket either?"

"Oh, yes, I have that," she said, producing it.

The man examined the half foot of green ticket, and grunted. "Los Angeles!" he remarked. "Well, I'll see what I can do for you—maybe some man'll turn out. I have to get the porter and straighten the rest out first." He dropped the ticket into her lap, and she watched him anxiously as he made his way through the car.

Horton was cautious in his observation now, but he was well aware of her look of white dejection, and it took him only a short time to forgive the glance she had given him. He acted on impulse, and rising, followed the conductor into the vestibule; his berth was promptly exchanged for an upper, by chance in the section the girl now occupied, and Horton betook himself to the smoking-car.

A half hour later the smoking-car had filled with men, and when he returned the car was quiet. The girl occupied his former seat, her small bag stowed away beneath it. She sat with her head laid back, her veil lowered, and her face turned to the blank window. They were passing along the river now, the scattered lights of the levee flickering faintly beneath them, but the dirty yellow of the wide river was swallowed up in a black abyss. Horton drew the evening paper from his overcoat pocket, and tried to fix his attention upon it, but he did not lose consciousness of the still figure across the aisle. It persisted in obtruding itself in spite of his efforts to the contrary. Why had he felt so certain he had seen her before? Was she going across the continent with nothing but that little bag? The gaudy, yellow leather suit-case that occupied the other seat of her section he knew belonged to the flashily dressed individual who had boarded the train at the same time with himself and announced his claim to the upper berth. . . . Had she been called to some sick-bed—a father, or brother possibly—not a husband—she looked too young? Perhaps she was going for her health—but why such haste then, and no one to see her off? Perhaps—perhaps——? Horton threw the paper down in disgust with a muttered exclamation at his own ridiculous state of mind, and fell to wondering when he would have his dinner. He was hungry—should he

go at the first call, or wait until later? It would perhaps be better to wait—it would help to fill up a long evening. . . . He might go when she did; she would have to raise her veil in the dining-car and,—he rose with haste and strode off to the smoker again, and there he determinedly spent the evening, going back after his dinner for a game of poker with three strangers. He was a good hand and playing in luck, but at ten o'clock he sought his berth. Most of the sections were empty, the curtains pulled back, but the curtains of the lower opposite were tightly drawn. Horton Payne thought of many things before his eyes finally closed, but his last conscious reflection was, "I don't believe she had any dinner at all."

II.

FELLOW TRAVELLERS AND AN INCIDENT

THEY had left Kansas City behind them the next morning, and were well out on the level, frost-bitten prairie, when Horton asked himself what he was going to do to while away the day. He had breakfasted as late as possible, and had come back to the sleeping-car to find pillows, card-tables, and novels in evidence. For so young a man he was an experienced traveller, and he glanced over the car with an appraising eye. The men he had had an opportunity to observe the night before, and he had been interested in the various types. The miner whose knotted hands and weather-beaten face were proof of years of toil and tardy success, was in strong contrast to the sleek, white-handed dealer in stocks. The born prospector, the man of wanderings, the dweller in lonely places, was there also, and the able financier of vast holdings. There was a sprinkling of agents of large firms, mostly youngish, wide-awake-looking men, with a New York cut of garments, and a smooth facility of speech. There was also the hanger-on, like the flashily-dressed man of the upper berth opposite. Horton had merely glanced over, but he had seen the black-gowned figure of the evening before, well drawn into her corner by

the window, and lolling opposite to her the occupant of the upper berth.

There was but one other woman in the car, a highly colored and luxuriant looking woman, who gave small heed to the very pretty little child that constantly wandered away from her up the aisle. Horton watched with somewhat cynical amusement the capturing of the baby by some one of the men, and the inevitable return to the woman of her property, which was done diffidently or boldly according to the nature of the man. A glance from her large black eyes, and a brilliant smile that showed her white teeth, thanked each one in turn, and at the lunch hour when she rose and led her child out there was not a man in the car whose eyes did not follow her with some degree of interest.

As she passed Horton Payne she looked full at him, a look certainly devoid of shyness, and he took cool note of her luxuriant beauty. She had a foreign air, and Horton set her down as Spanish—"Mexican Spanish," he added to himself—it was not a type he admired. His gaze followed her, however, and when he turned he looked directly into the deep gray eyes of the girl opposite. They held for a fleeting second an expression he could not fathom, and then she looked through him with a consummate skill that sent a sudden pulse to his finger-tips, a warm flush of anger. She knew perfectly well that he had given up his

berth to her—the conductor had so informed her—he had been mindful of her manner of the night before and had not even glanced in her direction, and she looked through and beyond him as if he were a disagreeable void. He had been perfectly conscious that she had sat the whole morning with her eyes on the uninteresting brown landscape, and he had even forborne to study her profile. He told himself hotly that she need not take such pains to show her disapproval of him, the last thing he desired was to obtrude himself.

His sense of injury nerved him now to turn and observe her deliberately. Her eyes had gone back to the window again, and Horton's first impression was the same as that of the night before—that he was certainly familiar with her features. Her head was small and exceedingly well set, the face oval, the chin softly rounded and deeply indented beneath the full under lip. The mouth was not large, the lips warmly red and beautifully curved, the nose straight and well formed, and the eyes set wide apart. Her very abundant dark hair was parted in the middle and gathered back loosely into the thick coil at the back of her head. When the sun touched it it turned a warm copper color, but in the shadow it looked quite black. There was a something unmodern and unusual in her beauty, difficult to analyze, unless possibly it lay in the shape of the head, and the contour of her face. The feat-

ures might almost be those of some beautiful Italian peasant girl, Horton decided, but the impression was striking only when her face was in repose and the eyes lowered; under the cool intelligence of her look it vanished. Her eyes were a gray without hint of blue, very heavily lashed, and the pupils unusually large. They dominated the face, giving it light and color, and meaning—they held both passion and intelligence, warmth and shadow. They did not belong to the recollection that evaded Horton, and he bent his brows in a puzzled search through his memory.

He was interrupted by the entrance of the man of the upper berth, who swung into his seat opposite the quiet black figure. He was redolent of his after-luncheon cigar, and appeared to be in an expansive mood. "Golly, it's cold out!" he observed to her profile. "Conductor says we'll be in for a snow-storm." He eased his trowsers at the knee, and throwing one leg over the other, displayed low patent-leather shoes and a vista of scarlet silk sock. His hard black eyes rested on her expectantly, but she was apparently as deaf as a statue. Horton had an impression that these were not the first remarks the man had endeavored to make to her. He looked the typical masher, and something of a bully also, and Horton unconsciously straightened his shoulders, awaiting the next development. The man observed her in silence for a moment, then bending forward he said something

in so low a tone that Horton did not catch it. It brought a response, however, for she moved deliberately and Horton could see her full face. The delicate color had left her cheek and her eyes looked curiously light, a white flame of scorn. She swept the man with it from the shiny black of his wavy hair to the gloss of his shoes, and rising stepped out into the aisle. Horton caught an edge of the gray glint as she passed him, and he watched her, fascinated, as she slowly walked down the car. She was not above medium height, but the slender roundness of her figure, her erect carriage, and the set of her head, made her appear taller.

Horton avoided looking at the man opposite—there are times when a look is as good as a blow in the face. He picked up his neglected magazine, apparently burying himself in it, but from that moment his thoughts had sufficient employment. His ennui, and a half-formulated desire for intelligent companionship on his long journey, faded into the background. He had not been in the habit of seeking acquaintances in his travels, but they had often come to him unasked. He had always regarded himself as incapable of rudeness to a woman, and that gray glint of scorn cut him like a knife. It set him in the same category as that over-fed animal in the next seat, and it rankled and hurt. He asked himself what possible difference it made to him what an over-sensitive girl thought—

after three days' time he would never see her again. But the fact remained that he did care intensely; that he longed to stand well in her estimation. From the moment he had first seen her she had interested him—he could not deny it—and perhaps her quick instinct had told her so, and she had misjudged him accordingly. If she had given him the opportunity he would most gladly have sought her society, and she probably knew it quite well. Certainly if she had been subjected to much of the sort of thing he had just witnessed she might well look with suspicion on every approach to interest.

The man opposite had departed, and some time afterwards the girl returned to her seat. Reaching up she detached from her hat the long veil that covered it, and arranging it so as to half shade her face, she laid her head back and closed her eyes. She had turned from the window, and as Horton rode backward, he faced her. She sat, her shoulders drooping a little, her hands clasped in her lap, her lashes a dark line on her white cheek. She looked ill, almost frail, and the hurt feeling that he had been nursing for the last hour melted away. She was travelling alone, without even a woman whose companionship she could seek—for Horton did not count the black-haired, brilliant-hued woman on the far seat—and she did right to hold herself rigidly. He deserved her ill opinion for having allowed his interest and admiration to

appear even for a moment. Having brought himself to a sufficiently chastened state of mind, he laid down his magazine and turned his attention to the dull landscape.

They were passing through stretch upon stretch of brown, frozen prairie, and the sun of the morning had long since vanished behind banks of low-lying snow-clouds. Miles of wire fencing and an occasional distant ranch-house with its collection of huge hay-barns showed that they were still in touch with civilization, but the night would carry them into the desert. Horton Payne was wondering what changes a decade or two would make in that limitless expanse, when he felt a light touch at his knee, and looked down into the soft little face of the baby that had wandered up to his seat. She looked up at him, smiling as if sure of her welcome. Horton lifted her to his knee, and her lips parted in a wider smile that revealed several small white teeth. Horton reflected that it was her mother's smile in miniature, and he wondered if fifteen or twenty years would give her as brilliant a plumage as the woman's.

She promptly rummaged in his waistcoat pockets and brought forth his watch, and for some time leaned contentedly against his breast playing with it and talking to herself, an entirely unintelligible jargon of her own. Horton could not remember when he had held a child in his arms, certainly not for a long time,

and with the capacity for emotion that was part of his many-sided character, he felt a soft thrill at the touch of her warm little body. She wearied of the watch in time, and her dark eyes, quick but soft in their glance, rested on the quiet figure opposite. She slipped from his knee, and before Horton knew what she was about, had crossed the aisle and with her surprising activity had climbed upon the seat beside the sleeping girl. Horton felt sure that she slept, for her hands that had been tightly clasped in her lap had gradually dropped apart and lay relaxed. He would not have ventured to approach that seat for any price, and he watched the child, half amazed and half annoyed. She seated herself close to the motionless figure, and reaching up laid her little hand on the sleeping girl's lips. Then Horton saw a picture that awakened his slumbering memory. The girl's eyes opened wide and she looked down for a startled moment into the child's face, then raising herself a little her arm went round the baby, holding her close to her cheek, and she lifted her face looking full at Horton, her eyes wide and blank still with sleep, but with a soft light growing in them. The veil had slipped back a little on her hair, and he knew instantly what the resemblance was that had so persistently eluded him. It lay somewhat in contour of face and arch of brow, but more in occasional expression, a look brooding, dreamy, absorbed. To Horton, who

was sensitive to impressions, it suggested the face of Raphael's masterpiece in the Dresden gallery. The next moment he could have smiled at himself, for the likeness had vanished completely. The child had flung herself with a gurgle of laughter into the girl's lap, and kicking up her belaced skirts and tiny pink-shod feet, begged for a romp with a zest thoroughly impudent and modern, and the girl's amused and inexperienced efforts to keep her from slipping to the floor were as unmadonna-like as possible. The veil was pulled from her head, and a strand of her loosened hair rested on her softly flushed cheek. Her gray eyes danced with laughter, and for the moment every vestige of classic repose had faded from her face. She looked what she evidently was, a very young girl, certainly not more than seventeen. Horton rose and went to the smoking-car with a curious sense of relief from tension. The haunting likeness was solved, and it was proved to his satisfaction that a white-faced hauteur was not the habitual expression of his travelling companion.

He found the smoking-car crowded. The porter was lighting the lamps, for the snow had begun to fall heavily, and it was twilight at four o'clock. He was hailed by his acquaintances of the night before, urging him to a game of poker, but he shook his head and took a seat that happened to be opposite the man of the upper berth and another of the same kidney. One

was large, sleek, and dark, and the other slim and ferret-faced, but in both there was no mistaking the professional gambler. The porter had not reached them in his lamp-lighting round, and they were leaning on their table talking. The train was slowing up and Horton caught some of their remarks.

"You ain't mistaken?" asked the small man.

"Hell, no!" said the other, biting off the end of his cigar and spitting it out on the floor. "I'd know *her*—" Horton lost the next words, and heard only the end of the sentence, "— but I'd give something to nail him!"

"Think you'll go on then?" inquired the ferret-faced man. His voice was not so thick as the other's and carried better.

"Damned if I can make up my mind," said the other. "If she'd only——" Horton Payne lost the rest.

"You'd better stick to the certainty," the small man rejoined, sharply. "He's a sight too slick for you, George."

"But the stake's bigger—" the man called George objected. The porter's bulk now came between them, shutting off the conversation from Horton, and when he had moved on the men gathered up their cards and rose, but Horton caught the last words before they parted—"She's got to—I'll see an' let you know —s'long."

The man was making for the sleeping-car, and Horton followed on his heels, for he felt a certainty that the brief sentences he had overheard referred in some way to the girl in the next car. He told himself with a good deal of emphasis that if the man had any intention of annoying her further, he might find himself kicked out on the prairie, and he took his seat with tingling fingers.

The baby had tired of her play and gone to sleep in the girl's arms. She sat with her cheek bent to the little dark head, her eyes on the floor, and paid no attention to the approach of the man. Hitherto he had kept to his own seat, but now he placed himself beside her, and spoke rapidly and low. She lifted her eyes for a moment, staring at him with a wide, startled look, then gathering the child in one arm she half rose and beckoned to someone seated behind Horton. He was on his feet now, but her look deliberately passed over him, and her action had been so quick that the young man behind him reached her first. Her words were clear and unhurried, and Horton heard them distinctly.

"I am sorry to trouble you, sir, but—might I speak to you a moment——?" The man beside her had risen with a scarlet face and uncertain air, and she pointed to the seat he had vacated. "Will you sit here, please."

The boy whom she had called to her aid—for Hor-

ton saw that though tall and broad-shouldered he was little more than a boy—took the offered seat, looking both surprised and puzzled, while the man whom she had ejected gave one furtive look round, and a wavering glance at Horton's face of white fury, and made haste out of the car. Horton was after him on the instant, and caught up with him in the vestibule. The next moment his hand was on the man's collar, and he whirled him round till they faced each other in the narrow space, the man scarlet and snarling, and Horton dead white.

"What do you mean by annoying that lady in there?" Horton Payne demanded, through set teeth. "If you repeat that sort of thing, I warn you that I shall break every bone in your body."

The man glanced over Horton's shoulder and took courage. "None of your damned business," he swaggered, but he backed a step or two as he spoke, "she's none of your property—I'll speak to any one I please —you —— —— ——" The wave of fire that swept over Horton turned things a distorted red, and he never knew just what he did in the next few moments. When he realized the situation the conductor and porter had pushed by him and were raising a crumpled looking figure from the swaying floor, and as Horton stood, still white to the lips, he was given a view of a grotesquely battered looking face, the eyes fast swelling, the thick nose bleeding profusely. The

figure was dragged to its feet and stood staggering.

"My lordy!" gasped the porter. "He's mos' daid!"

"Dead nothin'," growled the conductor, who seemed to be of pugilistic sympathies, "his looks is spoiled, that's all. . . . See here, sir," he added to Horton, "just lend us a hand, will you, till we get him in the dressing-room—you don't want the whole car onto this."

Horton helped them support the man to the end of the vestibule and into the dressing-room, and stood leaning against the closed door while the other two applied towels and cold water. The treatment appeared to be effective, for the man growled out that he was all right.

"Of course you are," the conductor assented, cheerfully. "A pair of black eyes, that's all!" He stood back, looking from Horton to the injured man, his bright blue eyes twinkling. "It's just a little private affair, I figure, and both parties now satisfied?"

"I wasn't looking for trouble," said the man, sullenly.

"Perhaps not," Horton retorted, with emphasis, "but I was. You let the porter get your bag in there, and keep yourself anywhere on the train you like, but don't you put your foot in that car—I don't need to tell you why. I heard your talk in the smoker this afternoon, and you would better 'stick to the cer-

tainty' as your friend advised." The man peered at him out of his swollen eyes with a startled air, and Horton looked steadily at him for a moment. Then his hand found his pocket, and the darkie grinned in delight, but the conductor looked preternaturally solemn. It was only when Horton had gone that he turned his back for a moment on the injured man, and slowly closed one eye at the porter.

III.

REFLECTIONS OF A KNIGHT-ERRANT

As Horton Payne nursed his bruised knuckles throughout the next day, he ruefully conceded that the rôle of knight-errant was essentially a thankless one, and that it was given to babes and beardless youths to bask in the smiles that in all justice belonged to himself. Not that the smiles were frequent or carried much meaning, however, for it was the boy who talked and smiled, and the girl that listened, sometimes very absently, Horton thought. The man of the upper berth had vanished; the black-eyed woman on the far seat had found a congenial companion in the gray-haired, heavy-faced man who breakfasted, lunched, and dined with her, rarely leaving her side; the baby made occasional excursions, but for the most part was satisfied with the companionship of the girl and boy opposite, and Horton gave his attention to their conversation, and the wind-swept desert without. They had left the snow-storm behind them after a delay in the night, and were crossing a corner of Colorado. Horton knew the line of mountains before them; they would reach Albuquerque some time in the late evening.

"I wish I were going on to Los Angeles," the boy said, for the third time that morning.

"But you say the Grand Canyon is so beautiful," she answered, in her soft voice. Horton had found a new charm in her voice; it was low and yet distinct, with a soft slurring of the hard consonants. It was not southern exactly—Horton could not place it.

"I wouldn't go a step but for my Aunt," he declared. "It's just one of her queer notions, and I know exactly what will happen. She'll meet me tomorrow morning and calmly announce that she has changed her mind, and we will take the next train to Los Angeles. You see my Aunt's a good sort—she's pretty good to me sometimes—but she does get the craziest ideas—like travelling up the Grand Canyon in December. Ugh! . . . Still I didn't mind when she wrote about it. She gave me this trip east during my holidays, and I'd have had to stay out of school altogether this year but for her, so I was ready to do anything she wanted to, but I wish now I had kicked."

"Where did you say she lived?" the girl asked.

"Her home is in Los Angeles, but she always goes somewhere else during the summers."

"And your home is on a ranch?"

"Yes, near Los Angeles." He lifted his shoulders with a gesture of nervous energy, his square chin growing more prominent as he spoke. "I just hate that ranch! Do you know, I was scarcely ever off it till I went to college. Oh, of course, I went to school at Los Angeles, but I worked like a Chinaman

all summer for years to get the chance to go to school. Two more years of it at law, and then the city for me!" His eyes flashed. "You know, when I see the chances a fellow has in that country—the way it's growing! Why take Los Angeles, it will be a wonder. In ten years, in 1903, it will be more than twice its size, and the chances for a fellow who has a good head and a few dollars! It makes one ache—the time it takes to get an education, and get started."

"Why don't you start at the money making without the education?" she asked. Her eyes rested on him tentatively, and a pleased light grew in them at his positive answer.

"I don't want just the money," he said. "I want what brains will bring, too,—educated brains," then he flushed scarlet, fearful of possible ridicule, but her answer was assurance enough.

"That is the way I think I should feel if I were a man,"—her voice fell,—"but I am just a woman," she added, sadly.

If he had been older, or more experienced, he might have put some of his thoughts into words,—Horton would have given something for his chance,—but he only flushed a little more deeply, and was silent for a moment. Horton studied him thoughtfully from his three or four years of superior experience, and was forced to grant that notwithstanding his appearance of a big overgrown boy he promised a forceful

personality. He was above middle height, stockily built, and broad in the shoulders, a body that wholesome out-door labor had hardened and made powerful. His features were still rather rounded and boyish in spite of the salient chin and keen gray eyes, and there was a dark down on his upper lip. Horton judged that he was about nineteen or possibly twenty.

The girl broke the silence. "Do you think there are chances for women too in California?" she asked.

The boy's eyes rested on her with a gleam of mirth. "To marry?—yes," he said.

She chose to treat the remark indulgently, and smiled. "I don't think that was what I meant," she said. "What can a woman do to make a living?"

"There you have me," he replied, laughing. "I guess about the same chance as in the east, for most things—unless she has money and knows how to invest it. Of course, anything like manual labor—servant's work—there's plenty of chance for that, and good pay."

There was silence for a time, and the boy bent forward, mischievously pinching the tip of the baby's shoe. The little thing dimpled and drew her feet up under her. She was curled up close to the girl, and had been eying him gravely while he talked. "Come over here," he said, patting his knee. For answer she smiled at him, and covering her eyes with her hand, peeped at him through her fingers. "You little

minx!" he said. He reached over and lifted her to his knee. "Isn't she a pretty one—how old do you think she is?" he asked the girl.

She looked at him absently. "I don't know," she said. Then as her eyes rested on the baby her expression changed, and she smiled at the little thing. "Oh,—I think she must be only a little over two—she can't talk yet."

"What's your name, baby?" he asked, pinching her cheek. She showed her small teeth in a smile, and gurgled something unintelligible, and he laughed. "It sounds like Chinese," he said. "She does know her name, I suppose, and I know mine, and you know yours, but we none of us know each other's," he colored a little as he spoke, but his look was questioning.

She answered him indifferently. "Names don't matter, do they, when people just meet for a day."

His color deepened, but his mouth set somewhat in what would be a hard line in older life. "Names always matter," he said. "They're something to remember one by at any rate—mine's Richard—Richard Allison——" He looked across at her expectantly, and she said very quietly, "Mine is Kate—that is short and easy to remember—Kate Moore."

"Kate," he repeated. "It's a pretty name, I think,"—his manner held a good deal of boyish admiration,—"it suits you, somehow."

"I am glad you approve of it," she said so coldly that he drew back hurt. Horton felt a sudden glow of satisfaction at his discomfiture that increased when the silence lasted, and Mr. Allison finally suggested that he would take the baby back to her mother, and his companion acquiesced with a careless "thank you."

On his departure she laid her head back with an air of utter weariness; Horton thought that she looked paler and thinner than she had the day before, and a question that had worried him through the last two days presented itself again for solution. How long could she stand a course of starvation? For he was convinced either that she was too ill to eat, or what was far more probable, too meagrely supplied with money. Her questions regarding employment struck him as pathetic in the face of the strict economy he had noticed. She allowed herself only one meal a day in the dining-car, and if she partook of anything else he had failed to observe it. She carried no lunch basket, and persistently declined the fruit the train-boy thrust under her nose, nor did she indulge either in books, magazines, or newspapers. His observations had so impressed him that the subject had grown upon his nerves, and he had cudgelled his brains in a vain endeavor to solve the difficulty. Was she going to land in Los Angeles an entire stranger, and short of money? It looked so to Horton. He had listened for

any mention of friends, or relatives, but there had been none. She seemed to shrink with nervous dread from attracting the least attention, suspicious even of the boy's rather blundering and harmless curiosity. Horton had passed beyond any sense of self-ridicule; he was too thoroughly in earnest, and on the *qui vive* for his opportunity. To-day he knew her name, to-morrow might offer him something more; it should not be the acquaintance of a day with him if he could help it.

The conductor passed through the car, and stopped a moment at Horton's seat. "Heard your party say he was getting off at Albuquerque," he announced.

"I am glad to hear it," Horton said. "It would be better if all his kind lost themselves in the desert."

"I guess you're about right there," said the conductor. "He an' that slim un are two hard cases, I figure."

"Are they both getting off at Albuquerque?" Horton asked.

"From their talk they was," the conductor replied. "They have tickets through, though, to Seattle—it's only a stop off, I guess."

"Thank you for telling me," said Horton, and the conductor nodded good-naturedly in answer as he passed on. Horton wondered if the girl opposite heard this conversation, and if it meant anything to her.

It was not until several hours later that the boy returned, and from his manner he was evidently doubtful of his welcome, but he was received with a smile, and was soon talking again, quite at his ease. Horton was amused by his comments on his Aunt. "Oh, no she isn't!" he said, in answer to some remark of the girl's. "She's not old, and she's quite good looking. She's short and plump, and she always wears a lot of gray hair up on the top of her head. She talks all the time, though her name is Mrs. Silence," the boy grinned, "no, really that is her name—Aunt Clarissa Silence."

"I think she must be interesting," said the girl.

"Well, perhaps she is," Mr. Allison admitted, somewhat doubtfully. "She has lots of friends, and they make allowances for her queer doings. You see, she has lived in Los Angeles almost ever since it was a village, and she has a good deal of property there. She takes an interest in all kinds of people, and some of the things that happen to Aunt Silence!" The boy laughed, "I'll give you a specimen—this was just before I went east. I came down from Berkeley and stopped over one afternoon just to see Aunt Silence—I told you she gave me this trip. . . . Well, as I went up the steps of her house there was a tall, good-looking man coming down, and I didn't see that he looked anything but all right. Aunt Silence hadn't shut the door after him so I walked in.

She was standing in the front room and Hop Lung was setting the chairs straight, and pulling the rugs about. Aunt Silence looked terribly busy and Hop's little slits of eyes opened wide at me for a minute, and then he went on working.

"'Hello, Auntie!' I said. 'Are you cleaning house?'

"'It's you, is it, Dick,' she said, just as if I had been running in and out of the house all day, 'put your satchel down and help Hop wheel that table back into the middle of the room, will you. We have had a poor, unfortunate gentleman here this afternoon,'—you don't need to ask Aunt Silence any questions, she just goes right on,—'I was sitting over here by the window,' she said, 'and I saw him come up on the porch. Hop didn't answer the bell, so I went myself and opened the door. He took off his hat to me—such a nice-looking man—and he smiled and said, "How do you do, Madame."'

"'I said, "How do you do, sir."'

"'Said he, "Madame, I have an unusual request to make of you, and I am grieved indeed to have to ask your help,—but I am in the most unfortunate predicament,"—'he was a very polite man, Dick, and he looked so sad!' my Aunt Silence said.

"'Don't let it worry you, sir,' she assured him. 'What is the matter?'

"'It is just this, Madame,' said he. 'I am, un-

fortunately, subject to attacks—I mean fits, Madame, and I feel one coming on now—it is most embarrassing to have one on the street—would you then allow me to have it in your house?'

"Now this is my Aunt Silence! 'You poor man!' said she. 'Of course you may! Here, Hop,'—for Hop had evidently appeared by that time,—'you wheel that table out of the way, and put back those chairs—here's a gentleman who wishes to have a fit—now, sir——'

" 'Aunt Clara!' I said.

" 'It is quite true, Dick,' she said. 'He had his attack, here, and it was a severe one—very severe—and when it was over I said to him, "Now you poor man, is there anything I can do for you—any medicine I can give you?"—he looked quite exhausted.'

" 'Thank you, Madame,' he said, gratefully. 'It is my custom after one of these wretched attacks to take a very strong dose of whiskey—but of course I could not ask you——'

" 'And why not?' exclaimed Aunt Silence. 'Here, Hop, bring bottle-whiskey, and pitcher-water, go, Hop, heap quick!' . . . 'Well, he took the whiskey—a very large drink,' Aunt Silence continued, 'and then he prepared to go. At the door he bowed to me, "I don't know how to thank you, Madame," he said, his voice trembling, " you have been so kind." '

" 'Not at all,' Aunt Silence replied, bowing to him

too, 'you are very welcome, and the next time you happen to be in this neighborhood, and you find one of them coming on, just come in.'

" 'Aunt Silence!' I said, indignantly, 'how could you! He was just guying you, or else he was a fraud, or insane—' and then I sat down and howled. Hop gave a grunt too, and then choked, and shuffled off to the kitchen, but Aunt Silence took my laughter calmly. She has big blue eyes that never change, no matter if she is laughing, or as mad as fire, and she only looked at me.

" 'Richard,' she said, gravely. 'I was quite interested to see how that gentleman would arrange his attack,'—and her mouth—Aunt Silence has a pretty wide mouth—began to go up at one side,—'and I thought too that if he went to all that trouble just for a drink—he certainly had earned it!' "

Horton had turned well away to hide his face during this narrative which the young fellow gave with a clever flexibility of voice, and power of imitation that made it really humorous, and the girl's laugh rang out full of unaffected mirth. "Oh," she said, "how funny!—But do you think he really had a fit?"

"I don't know," said Mr. Allison.

"But do you think your Aunt thought it was a fit?"

"I don't know," he repeated, grinning. "If you knew my Aunt Silence, you wouldn't know either."

"I wish I did know her—I think she must be fun." She spoke with a girlish lilt in her voice; her laughter seemed to have melted her reserve for the moment.

"Well, you can know her," said the young fellow, quickly. "I'll wager my hat we are back in Los Angeles in two days, and I will bring Aunt Clara to see you—she would fall in love with you. She's peculiar, but she is an awfully good friend to have—Aunt Silence is."

The boy's keen eyes were on her, and Horton could not restrain his own quick glance. There was a moment's pause, and then she answered evenly, "Thank you—it's kind of you, but I won't know just at first where I shall be—" then as if sorry for the hurt his look expressed, she added hesitatingly, "I might let you know when I am able——"

"Would you really do that!" He was eager again, almost stammering in his earnestness. "I didn't want to bother you—only I thought—going to a place alone, and you hadn't mentioned friends—I make fun of Aunt Silence, you know, but really, she is fine, and she has position too——"

"I know what you mean," the girl interrupted, still speaking gently. "She has a heart large enough to take in a stranger, and she has a position that allows her to be original, regardless of foolish people's opinions."

"Yes," said the boy, energetically, "that's exactly what I mean." He dived into his pocket, bringing forth paper and pencil. "See here," he exclaimed, "I will write down her address—I will be there for a day or two, even if we do go up the Canyon—and there is my Berkeley address too. You will let me know, won't you?" he paused, looking up, pencil in hand.

"When I can, I will," she said in a tone that Horton thought he understood better than the boy. Young Allison's eyes were shining, but the girl's manner was lifeless, and she complained presently of a headache. He arranged a pillow for her, and she covered her head as was her wont, and either slept or appeared to sleep for the rest of the afternoon. Allison sat opposite to her, apparently reading, but alive to every movement of his companion. Horton felt almost sorry for him as the afternoon wore on. When she did arouse herself, Horton heard him begging her to dine with him, but she declined resolutely, and the young fellow went alone. In an incredibly short time he was back, and remained a fixture until she ordered her berth made up. He talked to her low and earnestly, and she was silent for the most part, listening with downcast eyes, her face white and tired. Horton did not hear any of their conversation, but he saw a part of their farewell.

They had reached Albuquerque, and the girl

pleaded her headache, "I wish I could stay up longer," she said, "but I think I would better go to the dressing-room while the train is still—I will say good-by now, for you will be leaving before morning." The boy took her hand in silence, and she thanked him in her soft, deliberate voice. "It has been nice of you to try and make my journey pleasant," she said, "and I am very grateful."

"You will write, won't you?" he begged, looking thoroughly boyish and miserable.

"When I can," she repeated, as before.

"Confound Aunt Silence!" he burst out, suddenly. "I'd have another day but for her!"

"Oh," said the girl, laughing a little, "oh, such language, and of your Aunt, too!" But he was too much in earnest to treat anything lightly. "Let me take your bag for you," he urged, and he followed her down the car and into the vestibule. Horton tormented himself for the rest of the evening by wondering if the young man had after all won a somewhat kinder farewell from her there, and he hugged to himself with positive joy the thought of Aunt Clarissa Silence awaiting her nephew in the cold hours of the morning.

IV.

THE LOST OPPORTUNITY

HORTON PAYNE spent a restless night, and woke early the next morning to a sense of vague discomfort that grew into a consciousness of the unusual. He lay for a time trying to gather confirmation of his impression, and realized then that there was perfect quiet about him. The jar and motion had ceased, they were standing still, and as he lay he could hear the moaning sigh of the wind as it swept along the side of the car. Horton parted his curtain, and looked down into the aisle. All was still, every curtain drawn, save those of the lower opposite. The curtains of the girl's berth were pulled back, and it was empty. Horton had a sudden sinking sensation that was fairly sickening in its intensity—she had also gone then during the night? Why were they standing still here in the midst of the desert? He had an impression that they had not moved for a long time.

He dragged at his clothes, and put them on, conscious only of a burning desire to learn if his fear was well founded—the conductor could tell him. Possibly she like himself had been waked by the stillness, and had risen. The thought steadied him in his haste to

be dressed, but the toilet that he completed in the dressing-room was of the briefest.

He went back through the car, but all was still curtained and quiet; and he went on quickly to the outer vestibule. The pale light of early morning met him with a chill breath, and he stopped a moment on the platform of the car looking out. They stood in the midst of a vast gray expanse, dim and illimitable, the gray of the earth meeting at the distant horizon the pale gray of the sky. The chill wind sighed drearily as it swept over the wide ocean of sand, and carried its murmur on and on, endlessly.

Horton swung himself out from the steps and looked about him. In the distance the engine sent up a column of black smoke into the sky, and there was a group of men moving about, one or two carrying lighted lanterns that showed as spots of sickly color in the universal pallid tint. Horton had guessed by now that there was some break-down, but that was not what interested him. He moved back, and leaning out on the other side, found the object of his search. She stood a few yards away in the sand, her back to him, facing the east. On the horizon a line of slowly widening pale pink divided the gray of earth and sky, and Horton stood on the lowest step watching it also. His feverish anxiety was over, and he felt almost content. It mattered nothing to him now how long they were held up on the desert.

The Lost Opportunity

It grew light rapidly, a colder light, that dispelled the softer mantle of gray. The pink line on the horizon widened like an opening mouth, the sullen lips of earth and low-hung sky showing distinct against the glow within. Into the opening came the sun, and hung a moment, its level rays touching the undulating sand waves with a rosy glow, tipping the green of the tiny cactus with light, and resting in warm brilliancy on the stretches of white alkali. Then the lips slowly closed, the light and glow faded away, the sky hung a sullen gray over a sombre earth, and the wind whistled more loudly as it caught up the eddies of sand. It lifted the ends of the girl's long veil and flung them into her face, and she caught them and held them down as she came back to the car. She was at the step before she looked up and saw Horton, and the expression that crossed her face was as swift as thought. It lifted her brows, and straightened her lips, a mere touch of hesitation, a drawing back, and it was gone. She looked up into his face as she put her hand on the rail to raise herself to the step, and Horton drew to one side, then bent down.

"Let me help you," he said. His voice sounded strange to himself. She gave him her other hand, her eyes still on his, and he drew her up close beside him on the step, his other arm steadying her for a moment as she swayed against him, gaining her balance. She was so near that her shoulder pressed his

breast, and he felt her breath on his cheek as he bent over her. The next moment she had murmured a chilly "thank you" and was gone.

Horton stood still a long time on the step staring out over the wind-swept sand. There was a pulse in his throat that pounded in a regular rhythm, and his mouth felt dry. . . . So it meant all that to him! Horton had a terror of his capacity for feeling, and the lengths to which it would carry him. He had the past to remember, and had promised himself to walk carefully in the future. Was that what he had been doing in the last few days? He had let one idea take possession of him to the exclusion of everything else. A face had touched his fancy, and straightway he had proceeded to clothe it with interest, and idealize a character he knew nothing at all about. The fact that she had sought to avoid him had only lent zest to his imagination. He told himself that he had studied her face with an artistic appreciation that was impersonal, but at the touch of her hand and her warm breath on his cheek the blood had leapt in his veins. There was nothing impersonal in that sensation; it was a perfect passion of longing that had swept over him.

He dropped down into the sand, and plunging his hands in his pockets, stood facing the gray expanse. Why should he not yield to his inclination—to whom was he accountable for his actions? If he could win

recognition from her, why should he not? Her mysterious reserve might have a perfectly simple explanation. Why should not her undeniable refinement argue gentle surroundings, and careful rearing? Had he found the last three homeless, foot-free years so attractive that he should desire a continuance of them?

The black-haired woman of the sleeping-car came out upon the platform to view the morning and the cause of delay, and watched him curiously. He was turned so that she had a good view of his profile. It was a face of contradictions, interesting to the student of physiognomy. The head and upper part of the face was really handsome, the forehead broad, with very straight brows, the eyes deeply blue and well set; the straight nose with its delicate nostrils lent a haughty distinction to the face, but the mouth and chin conformed to no canons of beauty. The jaw was massive and powerful, the mouth large with full mobile lips that in a smile parted over a row of big white teeth; it was a mouth impressive either in anger or laughter, in sarcasm or amusement. It was its capacity for expression that saved it from pure animal coarseness. The eyes belonged to the idealist, the nose to the highly fastidious, and the jaw to the man of stubborn passions.

The Spanish woman was not much of an analyst, but she had the instinct of her kind for an attractive

personality. Tall and broad across the shoulders, deep in the chest and narrow in the hips, he looked strong and supple of muscle. As he stood erect, his head thrown back, gazing into space, he presented a picture of virile young manhood that the woman did not fail to appreciate.

She smiled brightly at his rather set face when he came back to the step. "Are we going to stand here all day?" she asked him.

He drew himself up and stood beside her, his air bantering. "Would you mind?" he returned.

"Not so long as I was entertained," she said, shrugging her plump shoulders, and glancing up coquettishly, "but I'm bored to death!"

"Really!" He leaned back against the car regarding her gravely. "How deceptive appearances are——"

She pursed her red lips. "Do you know where Joplin, Missouri, is?"

"I have a vague idea."

"Do you know how much lead is a ton, and how many tons all the lead mines in America produce in a year—and how exorbitant the transportation rates are, and how much was paid for the Mary Ann and dropped in the Alva C.? . . . And do you like Worcestershire sauce with porterhouse steak, and mustard with mutton chops, and does shrimp salad give you a pain—and——"

"Oh, spare us!" exclaimed Horton, laughing. "How can you endure it? Don't you long for the end of the journey?"

"Yes, but what am I to do? I can't look out of the window all day—it's too dreary—and charming people don't come and talk to me——" her look was expressive, and Horton laughed again at her impudence, half attracted in spite of himself. Her vivid color had risen, and her eyes sparkled.

"Are you going to stay in Los Angeles too?" she asked then, and Horton was meditating a reply, when something soft and heavy slipped down the steps and clung to his leg. It was the baby.

He bent over quickly and raised her, his look very gentle. "Hello!" he said. "You are up early, little girl—are you trying to fall off the car? Let me take her back for you," he said to the woman, and the glance he gave her was cool in its polite indifference.

It was well along in the morning when they moved on, running slowly because of their disabled engine; they could not expect now to reach their journey's end until after nightfall. The wind had risen to a gale, catching up and whirling the sand in clouds, and the sky was leaden, resting in heavy fog on the distant line of mountains. Horton knew the meaning of the low-lying clouds well enough to predict that a deluge of rain would be awaiting them in the San Bernardino Valley. He had spent the morning in the smoking-

car, busied with his meditations, but they had only led him into the blind alley of his inclination. He had decided to seek his opportunity—he would harbor neither doubt nor the possibility of disillusion. He had passed judgment on the manner of woman his observation had revealed, and his imagination clothed, and he would be turned aside by no apparent irrelevances. He had endured the hours in the smoking-car as long as he could, and had gone back to his old seat.

Horton was right in his prediction. They passed through the low-lying fog clouds of the mountain into a down-pour of rain. It streamed in rivulets down the window-panes, shutting out all view. Only once during the afternoon was there a respite. The rain ceased and the sun shone for a few brief moments. The snow-tipped mountains stood out then, a wonderful deep blue, the foot-hills a wet brown in contrast, the green stretches of orange groves, sheltered by their rows of sombre eucalyptus, glistening in the vivid sunlight; it came suddenly like the revelation of a future to the doubtful-minded. Horton raised his window and let in a rush of cool air, its dampness laden with the exquisite scent of wet earth and orange leaves. The girl had lifted her head from the pillow on which it had rested all afternoon, and gazed eagerly on this glimpse into a new world. Her face brightened, a faint color coming in her cheeks, and Horton

watched her absorbedly, keeping his window open for her sake long after the rain had thoroughly wetted his shoulder.

The hours of the late afternoon seemed endless. The lassitude of a long and tiresome journey rested on the entire car, a longing for fresh air and solid ground under foot. The girl sat with white face and heavy eyes. As evening drew on she leaned over several times to ask the porter the hour, but otherwise she sat perfectly still. Horton had no inclination for the dining-car; he felt certain that she had eaten nothing that day but fruit, and the thought of plentiful food for himself was repellent. He raged internally at his helplessness. She looked too ill to walk out of the car, and a silly conventionality forbade his laying his well-filled purse in her lap.

After dark she was plainly nervous. A spot of color began to grow in her cheeks, and she sat up straight, her eyes restless in their gaze. Her look passed over Horton several times with the usual blank indifference, and his jaw set more and more determinedly. The rain had not lessened as they at last made their slow way into the town, the blurred lights slipping past them. Even before they came into the station, she had risen and hurried into the vestibule, where she stood waiting with several others, and Horton had followed her. He was obsessed by the fear that after all he would be unable to prevent her going

her way without a word or look for him. It had grown on him minute by minute until he was in a veritable panic. Whether he would only keep her in sight, and learn her final destination, or by some inspiration be given his opportunity, he did not know; here at the end of his journey, and after all his hours of consideration, he was merely acting blindly.

She was the first off the train, and hurried along the sloppy platform, Horton following with his long swift stride. She went straight to the ticket-office, and pushed her way in front of the waiting group. Horton came up too late to hear her question, but the man's answer reached him. "No, and it won't be—there's not a train running," he said, in his harsh voice. "Nothing's come through since morning—it's a bad wash-out."

"When will they run again?" Her voice sounded sharp and strained.

"I can't tell you," said the man, impatiently; "not while this south-easter lasts—may be tied up a week."

She took her hand from the window ledge, and turning walked an uncertain step or two, and stopped. It brought her almost against Horton and she looked straight into his face. He was quite conscious that she did not see him—her eyes were dazed and her brow was drawn like one who has had a blow; in the glare of the station lights, she appeared positively ghastly. She looked as if she would fall, and Horton dropped

his bag and took her arm. "What is it?" he asked.

She answered him mechanically. "He says they may be tied up for a week," and then as if dazedly aware of her surroundings, "I must sit down—somewhere."

The room was crowded, and Horton drew her to a vacant space by one of the windows, standing before her so as to screen her somewhat from view. He thought she would faint, and tugging at the latch of the window, he raised it enough to let in a gust of wind and rain. "Let it blow in your face," he said. "You will feel better in a minute."

He held her against his shoulder, watching her anxiously until her face gained a more normal color, and her look was less vague. She moved presently and lifted her head, but Horton spoke with decision, "Please don't move till you are able. Regard me as a post, or the wall, or anything inanimate you like. You are not fit to stand and there is not a seat in the room—just tell me what the trouble is, and I will help you if I can."

She reached out and laid her hand on the window-sill, partially supporting herself by it, and turned so as to face him. He saw that she was struggling to overcome her weakness, and gain somewhat of her usual poise, and also that she was considering. "I expected to meet the Southern Pacific train here this evening," she said finally. "From what he said there

may be none for days, and I shall have to wait——" There was a note of evasion in her voice that did not escape Horton.

"But there are plenty of places where you can stay," he replied; "it would be only a few days at the most."

She stood silent for a time, her eyes on the floor, and he waited until she looked up at him. "Yes," she said, slowly, "but I have only four dollars in my purse." Her voice was low, and not all her effort could hide the quiver of her chin.

"You poor child," said Horton, gently. He put his hand over hers on the window-sill and held it. "Now, will you please listen to me," he said, earnestly. "Don't think again about the money—I will lend you as much as you need,—that is just a matter of business,—but there is something else I wish you would tell me—do you trust me, or do you think I am like that man that thrust himself on you in the train?"

There was no evasion in her manner now and her eyes met his steadily and honestly. "I never thought that," she said, "and I should trust you."

"Thank you," he replied, "I wasn't sure. . . . Now have you any idea where you would like to go?"

She shook her head doubtfully. "The conductor spoke once of the Hollenbeck—but I am afraid it is very expensive. He mentioned another hotel—but——"

"The Hollenbeck would be the best," said Horton, "and if you are well enough now I will see about the omnibus. I must find you a seat first——" He turned to look about the room, but she stopped him.

"I would rather stand here, thank you."

He looked doubtfully at her. "I will not be gone long—you are sure you feel better?" His manner expressed all the solicitude he felt; it held both deference and kindness, and the girl's eyes suddenly filled with tears, her lips trembling.

"Yes," she said, "I am—indeed I am. I was sick with fright as much as anything else, and your kindness has relieved my mind. . . . Please do not wait."

Horton perhaps looked his thoughts, but he only said, "I will hurry—and before I go——" He put a small but heavy purse in her hand, turning away before she could thank him.

As he pushed his way through the damp crowd at the door and looked for a conveyance, he had a feeling more nearly approaching happiness than any he had known for a long time. Could he have asked for a better opportunity? He would be a poor wooer if he could not gain some response in the time chance had given him. He felt a sense of elation. Three days would it be? Possibly. He gladly endured the drip from the station roof, and earnestly hoped for a continuance of the downpour. He purposely chose

the discomfort of the hotel omnibus rather than a carriage, for he was determined not to forfeit her good opinion by taking any possible advantage of the situation. For the same reason he would not stay at the Hollenbeck, and would take care to tell her so.

He returned to find her leaning against the window, looking weary and ill enough to drive all other thoughts from his mind. He remembered her meagre fare of the last few days with a perfect passion of pity. "The omnibus is here," he told her. "I want you to have some dinner as soon as you can. If you give me your check I will have them send down for your trunk."

"I have no trunk," she said, dully. She spoke like one who had reached the limit of her strength, and Horton asked her no more questions, but guided her to the omnibus. She sank into a corner and lowered her veil, and they rode in silence through the deluged streets. The two other passengers were silent like themselves, and the rain pelted on the roof above them. Horton put aside his surprise at the last confession his companion had made—she would explain it with the rest that was unaccountable—his first care was to look after her comfort.

He had decided on what he would do, and led her directly through the hotel corridor to the dining-room. "We will get something to eat first," he said, and she acquiesced in silence. His whispered instruc-

tions sent the waiter flying to the kitchen, and Horton observed her anxiously as she lifted her veil with shaking hands. The waiter would come none too soon he thought as he looked across at her. He poured out a glass of water for her and she leaned her elbow on the table, supporting her head with her hand as she swallowed a little of it. It was hot soup the waiter brought, and a moment later a whiskey cocktail. She ate in silence, her eyes on her plate, and then drank a little of the whiskey, while Horton busied himself with the menu; he was anxious to give her time to recover. When he allowed himself to look up, she was leaning back in her chair, and a touch of color had crept into her cheeks.

She smiled a little. "I think that saved my life," she said with an attempt at lightness. "My head felt like a bit of thistle-down, and my feet a hundred miles away—I haven't eaten much to-day."

Horton did not tell her how well aware of the fact he was, but he caught at her tone gratefully; he had been uncertain of the attitude she would take. "It's my belief," he assured her, "that hot soup and a cocktail applied at the right moment will raise the dead—either one separately is quite effective, particularly the cocktail, but together—they are irresistible."

"You speak as if you knew. Would you recommend it for the nearly drowned? . . . Listen to the rain—will the place be washed away?"

Horton shook his head, smiling. "You will not say that when you have lived out here a year or two. The correct thing is to be thankful for every drop that falls."

"Are you a Californian?" she asked.

"Yes, but I suppose I should call New York my home—or it was—I haven't any now. I have not really lived here since I was a child, but I have been out here a good deal—in Southern California, and I like it; it is so very livable. Climatically it has always appealed to me as the perfection of common-sense, and financially it offers possibilities quite sufficient to turn one feverish—if one is inclined that way. Of course socially it is chaotic and will be for many a long day—it is only natural that it should be. What I like is that here one stands with one's face turned to the future—you can only breathe in that position—and to me it is far more attractive than looking backward." Horton had talked on with the deliberate intention of putting his companion at her ease, and was rewarded by the smile she gave him. He turned then to a more personal note. "I have been travelling around for the last three years with an idea of settling down somewhere if I was attracted, and here I am back again, much at the same point from which I started. It is association after all that makes the charm of a place. I have practically no relatives, not even a sister, brother, or wife, and I have about concluded that if

there is any spot I am going to call home, I would better be choosing it." Horton had no wish to force the confidence of his companion; he had hoped that candor on his part might melt her reserve, but in that he was disappointed. In the hour that followed he discovered that he was not talking to an inexperienced girl, but to a clever woman who was mistress of the situation. She was frank in the expression of her gratitude, but she gave no explanation of her embarrassing position; she simply ignored it. She evinced an impersonal but flattering interest in all he had to tell her of himself, and showed herself quick and resourceful in subjects for conversation, but she skilfully evaded the few and faint endeavors Horton made to pierce her armor of secrecy. He was at a loss to understand her, but his earlier pity of her apparently helpless and unprotected condition was merged in admiration of her tact and quick intelligence. In his steadily growing respect there was no place for doubt of her—it would not stand the test of her perfect charm. He had been strongly attracted by the girl, but he was fascinated by the woman. She carried him out of the ordinary, and played upon his fancy. She touched the artist and idealist in him, and stirred sentiment and recollection.

She gradually lost her look of weariness, and as she leaned forward slightly, the color deep in her cheeks, a smile faintly touching her lips, or more

rarely lighting her eyes, Horton gave himself up to the delight of the hour, and the charm of his companion. She was vivid, tantalizing, impersonal. She drew him out on the subject of his travels, and he learned at last a bit of her history which he treasured. "I spent my childhood abroad," she told him. "When you were at Weimar did you go on to Eisenach? Do you remember it?"

"Do I!" Horton exclaimed. "I walked all over those hills, and haunted the Wartburg. I spent a week there, in the little inn across the valley from the Wartburg—I can't remember its name.

"The Elisebetan's Ruge?" she prompted. "And when you left Herr and Frau Tupfer, and the five children, and the Dienstmadchen, and the Köchin, they were all on the steps to say farewell, and they gave you a bouquet—a tight little bouquet—the flowers all squeezed together into a little cone, like this——" she brought her hands together in a pretty gesture.

"Yes, but the children were all grown up then, all but two." He leaned his folded arms on the table, and bent over, his blue eyes alight. "Were you a very little girl when you were there?"

"I was old enough to remember," she replied. "I was there at the inn a long time. . . . Do you remember the beech woods, and the pine forest across the valley—the pine-needles were so thick your footsteps couldn't make a sound. . . . And the Drachenschlucht! I used to climb all over the rocks there

and gather the ferns. Then the shops in the town—there was a place where they did wonderful embroidery, great blue dragons on white linen—and the little windows full of old silver!" Her eyes were shining.

"Yes," said Horton, smiling at her, "I spent a good deal of time in those shops. . . . I couldn't help noticing the pin you wear—I have admired it—is it something you found over there?"

"No," she said, with a touch of hesitation, "I have had this ever since I can remember—I think it was my mother's. I almost never wear jewelry, but I am very fond of this. Would you like to see it?" She unfastened it from her collar and held it out to him. There was something more intimate, as of older acquaintance, in the act, and as Horton took it from her hand his fingers touched her soft palm lingeringly, and not all his self-control could hide the sudden fire that flamed in his glance. He dropped his eyes to the ornament in his hand, thoroughly annoyed with himself; he was grateful to her for her quiet ignoring of his momentary lapse.

"It is Flemish silver and quite old, I think," she said, in her cool, deliberate voice. "Do you think it is valuable?"

"I should think that it was, to one who knew anything at all about such things," Horton heard himself say. "It is certainly old and the workmanship is beautiful."

It was in reality a beautiful thing, a pendant a

little over three inches long, of filigree work in dull silver, a tracery of roses and leaves, the cutting and conception showing plainly its age. The petals of the roses were done in gold, and raised on the silver, a rose diamond forming the heart of each flower. Horton counted a dozen of the small sparkling diamonds. "Do you know its history?" he asked, as he handed it back to her.

"No," she said, absently, "I had forgotten that I had it." She looked down thoughtfully at it as it lay in her hand. "Do you like it?" she asked.

"I think it is exquisite," he answered truthfully. "I should think you would value it—particularly if it had associations."

"I saw something like it at Amsterdam," she continued, as she fastened it at her throat, "but I was too little to ask about the cost——"

"Holland, also!" exclaimed Horton. "Where else have you been?"

"Oh, in many places," she said, looking down, her expression changing. "You seem to have spent a great deal of time in Germany—why was it? Did you enjoy it the most?"

"Perhaps I did on the whole, but it was owing to circumstances that I was there so long. Were you in Dresden?" he asked her. "Do you remember it?" She had granted him a morsel, and he was eager for more.

"Yes," she said, slowly, "I was, and I remember some things well."

"You remember the Madonna, the Sistine Madonna?" He flushed at her quick glance, but went on. "It was a likeness to the painting, something about your forehead and eyes, that made me stare at you when you came on the train—I appeared to be rude—but I didn't mean to be. I thought I had seen you before, somewhere, and yet I knew I had not, and I kept on wondering and trying to place you, until the baby woke you up and you held her. For a moment you had the same expression, and I knew then what it was that had puzzled me——" He stopped, struck by her manner, and in the next few moments he would most gladly have recalled his words. Her eyes had met his with that curious contraction of the pupil that made them appear strangely light, and then her gaze dropped, her color slowly fading until she was the cold, white-faced girl of the last few days. Horton cursed himself silently for a blundering fool, though he was bewildered at her emotion, and ignorant of its cause. He felt absolutely wretched, for he struggled with the conviction that in some unaccountable way he had hurt her terribly. He was at a loss for words, but she spoke without looking up.

"Likenesses are strange things," she said, evenly, "and they haunt one without apparent cause or

reason." The waiter had cleared the table for coffee, and she lifted a teaspoon, turning it in her slender fingers, marking lines and cross lines on the cloth as she spoke, her eyes still lowered. "I am always seeing them, and the worst of it is that it is the attributes of the person one is reminded of, and not the features—or rather, the likeness instantly recalls the attributes—it is an injustice to the resembler."

Horton looked at her in puzzled amazement. "Did you object to the comparison I made?" he asked.

"No—oh, certainly not!" She sat up straight, with an impatient gesture, as if collecting herself. "I don't think I could explain just what I did mean—Mr. Payne, don't puzzle over me—just let me be." She smiled again at him, half sadly, half mockingly.

He studied her elusive expression for a moment, then turned from the unaccountable in her to something tangible. "How did you know my name?" he asked.

She glanced at him from under her lashes, a look wholly mischievous. "Perhaps in the same way that you learned mine?" she retorted. If she was seeking to divert him she succeeded, for his color deepened, and he looked guilty.

"I overheard you tell it to that boy on the train," he confessed. "I was not exactly eavesdropping, but —your voice was far more interesting than my book—do you blame me?" His manner was eager again,

his eyes alight; he had seized instantly upon her approach to coquetry, and she stiffened.

"Certainly not," she said, coldly. "It was a dull journey and you wanted amusement. There is nothing mysterious about the way I learned your name. It is engraved on the silver handle of your umbrella, and it stood at the corner of my seat for a day or more." She leaned back as she spoke and glanced over the dining-room. "Every one else has finished long ago," she added, "and I ought to go and ask about my room, I think,—and you—are you not tired after such a day?" Her wonderfully expressive voice dropped on the last sentence to an intonation so soft as to take the sting but not the meaning from the preceding words. She intended that he should keep his distance, at least until her own good time. If Horton had cared less he would have been angered by the quiet assurance of her attitude. He would have to travel according to her will—for a time. As he folded his napkin with an uncertain hand he vowed to himself that he would be patient for a time—how long he could not tell—but she should hear him in the end. As she walked by his side out of the room, he looked down at her with a tightening sensation in his throat. He had wandered about in search of his happiness, and made his mistakes, and he had decided that it stood within reach of his arm; he would make a manful struggle rather than lose it.

They had reached the door when she stopped. "My bag?" she said, anxiously. "I had forgotten about it."

"It is here," said Horton. "I had it, and the waiter took it. If you will wait here I will get it." They had stepped into the corridor, and Horton led the way to a corner that was screened by a bank of palms. There was a rug on the floor, a desk by the window, and several easy chairs. Horton left her and turned back into the dining-room. He brought her bag back with him, and she half rose at his approach, but he stopped her with an entreaty.

"Please, not yet!" he begged. "Not for a few minutes—just ten minutes—till I smoke a cigar—that is, if I may. Then I will go out into the rain and leave you in peace." His voice held more of appeal than he knew, and she hesitated, plainly unwilling.

"I am afraid it is late," she objected.

"It is only a little after nine," he urged. "I will go for a cigar, and be back in a second. . . . Just ten minutes," he continued half laughing, "they will be gone before you know!" He bent to put her bag at her feet, and as he did so he saw the weary droop of her lips. "Are you so very tired?" he asked with a quick change in his voice that made it almost a caress. "I forget all you have been through to-day—I am a selfish brute. Let me take you to the office, and I will say good-night."

She started to rise, then dropped back into her chair. "No," she said, as if answering a question put by herself, "I will stay." She looked up at him as he stood uncertain, a smile lifting the corners of her mouth. "I promise to wait for you," she said, and Horton turned to go, looking back at her as he went. Some one pushed open the side door near them, bringing in with him a rush of damp air that set the palm leaves in motion, casting a wavering shadow on her lifted face. Horton was paying no attention to his steps, and ran against the man who had just entered, with a force that brought the umbrella the man was carrying to the floor.

"I beg your pardon—" Horton exclaimed, "I——" He had seen the other's face, and stopped, growing white to the lips—"*You!*" he said, clearly.

"Yes, I!" the other retorted, ironically. "And what of it?" He stood tall and straight, a young man, a little older possibly than Horton, but of much the same build. His rather heavy mouth smiled unpleasantly, while his eyes narrowed into a look guarded and observant, that changed the entire expression of his unusually handsome face.

For a moment they stared at each other, from beneath lowered brows, then Horton turned his back in silence and walked slowly to the office desk, while the other lifted his umbrella from the floor and went on to the elevator. Horton stood and watched him as

he ascended, his face set and thoughtful. He took a cigar from the box the clerk held out to him, and lighted it absently, going very slowly back to the corner he had left. He was trying to rid himself of a disagreeable sensation, that he might enjoy fully the ten minutes for which he had begged. He determinedly forced it into the background of his thoughts, and as he passed behind the screen of palms his look grew bright again with eagerness.

The alcove was as he had left it, but her chair was empty. He felt merely a faint shock of surprise at first—she had probably stepped out into the corridor. He came out himself, and looked up and down. The waiter had closed and locked the dining-room doors while he had been talking to her a few moments before. As he stood at the desk getting his cigar he had commanded a view of the elevator and the stairway; the only person that had gone up was the man he had watched. She was not in the corridor—where was she? He stood for a time considering, a sensation of cold at his finger tips, for a possibility had taken form in his mind. He walked to the side door and met a bell-boy hurrying in out of the rain.

"Did you see a lady in black going out?" he asked, in a curiously quiet voice.

"Yes," said the boy. "She came out just as the bus drove off—just a minute ago."

"Did she take it?"

"No, sir," said the boy, eying him in surprise. "She walked; she'll be soaked in two minutes—she will——"

"Which way did she go?" Horton interrupted, shortly.

"Up towards Spring," said the boy. Horton made no reply but stepped out into the rain.

"Gee whiz!" the boy ejaculated, his surprise keeping him standing in the drip from the roof. "What's up now—gone without his hat too!" and he turned back into the hotel to impart his amazement to the clerk.

V.

A DREAM AND A MEMORY

It was after midnight when Horton kicked his soaked garments into a corner of his room, and sought his bed. His hands and feet were numb and cold, but there was a wheel turning steadily in his brain that wound and unwound his thoughts as a spooler would cotton. It went on endlessly, monotonously, winding and unwinding, as he lay on his back, his eyes fixed on a flickering strip of light on the ceiling.

He went over each incident of the last five days with painstaking care—only it was more nearly five months. He recalled every word, every look, with the accuracy of the partially intoxicated. The unwinding process brought him down to the moment when, walking out of the hotel into the rain, he had reached the corner and looked up and down a drenched and empty street. He remembered that he had walked a couple of blocks before it had occurred to him with sufficient force that a woman who would of her own volition go out into that deluge, and at that hour of the night, must have a very strong desire to avoid a man who had endeavored to show her nothing but respectful kindness. It was an insult to all that was best in him. The thought had carried him back to

the hotel again where he braved the wide-eyed curiosity of the bell-boy and clerk, and secured his hat and umbrella. He had a half block to go to his own hotel, and as he splashed through the puddles in the sidewalk with the recklessness that already-soaked shoe-leather inspires, the other explanation presented itself as admirably reasonable and supported by evidence. Why all the mystery, the evasion, the hurried journey, the obscure meaning of the gamblers on the train, the charm of that evening and its strange close? He had been fairly mole-eyed in his infatuation, in his determination to delude himself. Was it beyond the range of possibility that an adventuress should wear a face as pure, and eyes as clear as those of the girl of the last few days? . . . But this line of thought turned him sick. He was wet through and shivering, for it was not a warm rain that the wind drove up under his umbrella; if he listened to common-sense he would hasten to his bed, but he would like an antidote for his unpleasant reflections as well as for the threatened cold of the morrow. His hotel was only a few yards away, and he turned into the brilliantly lighted Palace bar. He decided as he lay awake through the long hours, that whiskey was as he had always found it, an exceedingly poor comforter. It seemed simply to have given edge and poignancy to his thoughts, instead of blurring them. . . . He had thought that morning when he stood in the sand and looked out

over the desert, that if he found a companion he would make a home somewhere in that out-of-door country, and ask nothing better of fate. A few hours later the thought had crystallized into a determination. . . . So he was not done with wandering about yet? He would look up the steamers for Japan; he would do it as soon as he was up in the morning. . . . It must be nearly morning now, and the rain was still coming down. . . . What a night for a girl to be out in. . . .

Horton was waked about midday by a knocking on his door, and he sat up gasping, unable for the moment to decide where he was. He had been dreaming that he was on the ocean with a white glare of sunlight about him. There was a row of deck-chairs, each holding a muffled form, but it was the last one in the corner that held his attention. He paced back and forth before it, a hundred times, and feared to go a step nearer. He kept up his walk, never ceasing, for hours and hours—in time she must uncover her face, and he would go nearer. The sun went down, and the wind rose and whistled along the deck; it lifted one shawl after the other, and whirled them up in the air, carrying them out to sea—there was nothing under them. He was seized with an agony of terror that gave him courage, and he went to the chair in the corner and laid his hand on the still

figure, and the shawl flattened beneath the pressure of his hand. The wind sighed and moaned along the deck and lifted it up in turn, tossed it high and wide, and flung it into the sea. . . . His eyes had opened to the brilliant light of a sunny day, and his glance fell on the huddled heap of garments in the corner; the incidents of the night before came back to him in a flash.

"Come in," he called.

A bell-boy opened the door and stopped, hesitating, when he saw Horton in bed. "A messenger brought this over from the Commercial Bank, sir," he explained, holding out an envelope to Horton. "He said it was to be given direct to you, so they thought at the office I better bring it up."

"From the bank," said Horton, frowning. "They don't lose any time." He sat up and took the envelope. "How late is it?" he asked.

"Half past eleven, sir."

"So late!—Let the window down over there, will you please. Is the rain over?"

"I guess so, sir; the sun's been out all morning."

"Are the trains going through on the Coast line?" Horton asked next, with a touch of eagerness.

"No, sir, they say nothing'll run to-day."

"Thank you," said Horton. "That's all." He lay back, his eyes on the open window. He felt a depression so absolute that he dreaded the effort of open-

ing the packet that lay on the pillow beside him. The thought of rising and considering some sort of plan for the future was utterly distasteful—to lie there and review the past was even more intolerable. He lifted the envelope with a sigh.

"This is nothing but a village," he muttered, in disgust. "A real estate village at that. I no sooner enter it than they scent me—I'll be damned if I talk land to them to-day!" He drew himself up on his elbow, his eyes dull, his jaw sullen; a vivid ray of sunlight stole up the counterpane, and reached his head, turning his fair hair as yellow as a child's. He tore off the end of the envelope, pulling out the folded paper within. Something bright and heavy dropped from it and lay on the pillow, and the ray of sunlight touched it also, playing with it till it flashed and sparkled;—it was the silver pendant that he had held in his hand the evening before. Horton sat upright with a gasp, and then reached out and touched it uncertainly as if it, too, might vanish like its owner, but it still lay sparkling on the pillow, and Horton's hand closed on it and held it tightly. His sleeve brushed the half unfolded paper that had been wrapped about it, and he caught it up eagerly, unfolding it on his knee. It was written upon in a small, slanting hand, and Horton's eye leapt down the page to the signature, and came back again to the first sentence.

"I hardly know what to say—there is so little I can say to you, and so much that should be said. I had determined to remain an enigma, or what is far worse for me to bear, a woman without a sense of gratitude, and surrounded by circumstances that place me in an equivocal light to say the least. I cannot explain to you why I am alone with only your bounty in my purse, or why I have been silent to you about myself—why a man like that creature on the train should think he had the right to address me, and least of all can I give the reason for my strange conduct to-night. I can only say that I am not an adventuress, or a dishonest woman; that I hate double dealing, and evasion, and questionable conduct, as one only can who has cause to know their inevitable results, and for all this I can only ask you to take my word. Least of all am I ungrateful. I think I could tell you some of your thoughts on that four days' journey. People who have suffered much, and have been forced to observe and judge of those about them, sometimes grow keen in the understanding of others. I knew perfectly well the attention and kindness with which you would have surrounded me—I knew who it was who gave up his berth to me, who it was who punished that man as he deserved, and kept him from me, and that it was you and not that nice, thoughtless boy who placed the fruit and cakes on my seat. I was famished that last day, and you fed me, and at last when I was cast utterly on your hands, I haven't words to express the deference and consideration with which you treated me. No, I am not ungrateful, nor will I forget.

"Please do not be anxious about me. I have learned through experience to take care of myself. I am comfortably housed and fed, thanks to you, and I shall not be penniless in the future, but I have a request to make, the last appeal to your forbearance—*please do not try to find me.* It would bring *real trouble* upon me, and I can give you neither pleasure nor satisfaction. I am *positive* and *earnest* in this—

let me remain to you an incident, one of the many, perhaps, that have dropped out of your recollection.

"I hope I shall not always remain your debtor, save in gratitude, and may I sign myself,

"Your Friend?

"I send you my little pin in remembrance of a happy evening, for so it was to me in spite of anxiety."

Horton read through to the end three separate times, growing red then white. He caught his lips between his teeth to steady them, and gazed blankly at the little slanting letters. "Oh, my dear, my dear," he whispered, "why do you make it so hard!" and bending his head he laid his lips against the paper on his knee.

BOOK II

I.

A BIRD'S-EYE VIEW

HORTON PAYNE rode slowly up the long incline of Cypress Hill drawing rein occasionally that he might turn in his saddle and look about him. This roundabout way over the Moneta foothills had become his daily ride. His holiday had resolved itself into long mornings in the saddle, riding up the mountain trails, and afternoons spent playing golf, but if possible he allowed himself time to take this circuitous way to and from his hotel and the Moneta Valley Country Club.

He had reached the crest of the hill now, and turning his horse rode to the very edge of the steep incline in order to look down upon the valley and the opalescent expanse of ocean beyond. The coast line bent inward here, a wide sweeping curve, the range of mountains with their foreground of foothills close at hand. From the outjutting ridge of foothill upon which Horton stood he commanded a magnificent view of the stretches of valley below. In the strip of valley that crept up between the foothills at his right, was nestled the town of Moneta, a collection of roofs, topped by tall palms and eucalyptus, here and there a more ambitious three-story brick building indicating the

straight line of the main street. The immense hotel with its brilliant setting of scarlet geraniums stood boldly out to view, its feet at the ocean's edge, its back to the ridge of hills that bounded the other side of the valley. To Horton's left was outspread the wide wooded slope of Moneta Valley, running far up into the blue mountain canyons. In this second stretch of valley were the country homes of those who made a playground of Moneta, and their Country Club clung to a bluff close to the continued sound of the ocean. Two miles of paved boulevard, following the curve of the beach, connected Moneta town and Moneta Valley, and Horton from where he stood could distinguish beneath him a speeding automobile or two, and an occasional more slow-going vehicle. On either side of him was the green and brown of the valley that lost itself in the steeper slope of the barren mountains; before him was the wide world of water, its limitless expanse broken only in the distance by a faint line of islands, and above him hung a dome of cloudless blue, a space dazzling and illimitable. The sun was inclining to the sky line of the ridge of hills at the right, and on the far horizon the meeting of sky and water was growing indistinct in the faint incoming fog of evening.

Horton sat straight in his saddle, his regard now on one reach of valley, now on the other, his appreciation of the beautiful satisfying itself fully. Mingled

with his enjoyment was a sense of regret that a mere prejudice had caused him to avoid so long this most exquisite bit of southern California coast. He had lived for years within easy reach of it, and had deliberately gone elsewhere when the hot desert winds at his inland ranch had urged him to seek the ocean. Judging from its reputation he had looked upon Moneta as an imitation Newport, and accordingly avoided it. Socially he had found it true to its reputation, but that was a small annoyance, lost sight of in the enjoyment of the natural beauty about him. It was a trait that as he grew older showed itself even more strongly than in his youth. Horton was no longer the boy of twenty-three who lived as impulse directed, uncertain of his future, and impatient of the past. He was fifteen years older than the youth who had sat in the brilliant morning sunshine with a girl's token of remembrance clasped in his hand, her note of farewell outspread on his knee. He had parted then with what had remained of his boyhood, and entered upon a manhood earnest enough in intention and accomplishment. Outwardly he had changed very little. He was somewhat heavier, and broader in the shoulders, the lines about his expressive mouth more marked, and the wrinkles at the corners of his eyes grown apparent when he smiled, but his eyes were as clear and open, and his hair as yellow still as a boy's. He sat his horse erect, his head held high,

a proud distinction of bearing that was more marked in the man of thirty-eight than it had been in the youth of twenty-three.

He sat so long without any apparent intention of moving that his horse grew restive, sidling and jerking at the bridle that even in his abstraction Horton held taut. He laughed a little as he patted his mare's neck. "Tired, Bess?" he said. "Well we'll go on." He looked about him regretfully, glancing at the sinking sun, and then in the direction of the Country Club. He would barely have time to reach the hotel and dress for the dinner-dance at the club. He regretted his good-natured acceptance of an invitation that would deprive him of a view of the sunset, and the changes of color on the water. He was not in the mood for gayety, and felt a strong distaste for the inevitable chatter and noise of the evening. His first acquaintance with Moneta society had amused him somewhat, but a two weeks' continuance of it had proved unalluring. His dinner would be at eight o'clock and it was already almost six. He turned down the incline that would bring him to level ground, then taking the most direct road to the hotel, urged his horse to a gallop.

II.

AFTER MANY DAYS

"But you were not intended to bring me out, you know, Mr. Payne," Elsie Knight explained. "I was just a sort of last thought."

"A very happy one for me," Horton declared, with the necessary degree of gallantry.

The girl laughed as her bright eyes travelled down the long dinner-table with its array of sparkling glass and silver, over which the pink shaded lights cast a warm glow. The room was long, low-ceilinged, and beamed and panelled in redwood, the entire side facing the ocean glazed from the ceiling to the floor; above the chatter of many voices could be heard the dull boom of the waves against the sea-wall. "I'm not going to say anything pretty in return until after the first dance," she said, "and I find out if you are the usual kind of young-old bachelor or—well—I'll tell you then what the other kind is like."

"But that is so long to wait," he objected. "I know by the collection of forks and spoons around my plate that we may expect at least eight courses; am I to sit all that time tormented with doubt as to what your final verdict will be?" He smiled down at her, a faint touch of amusement lighting his eyes.

She shrugged her already high shoulders until they almost met her small pink ears. "I am afraid you are the usual kind—you begin just right."

"That's condemning me too early," Horton declared. "Describe the usual kind to me—please do—and I shall endeavor not to resemble the description."

She laughed again. "Well," she said, "you rose this morning about ten o'clock—you were at the club last night until one o'clock playing bridge with Richie Ferrell, Burke English, and Mr. Colton—and you went in swimming at eleven. Then you took a horseback ride at twelve—a short one—took lunch at the club—decided to golf not bridge—came out here to the Country Club and drank two or three highballs before, one or two during and after, and got back to the hotel just in time to dress. Then you motored back here with the McKelveys, or the Sarks, or the Littons, and had a cocktail—or two—and stayed with the cocktail and Burke and Richie and the rest until the very last minute so as not to be bothered by having to talk to the women. Then you had your dinner partner's name handed to you, and you bowed very nicely over my hand because you happen to be a stranger, and had never met me before. If you had been Burke, you would have said, 'So, Elsie, we go in together do we—who in the name of conscience are we waiting for now? I'm hungry.' Then again—if you were Burke—you would talk about nothing in par-

ticular during dinner and stare at one of the new divorcées, and when it came to the first dance, you would disappear for a smoke with the rest and only turn up in time to take one turn about the room—or not appear at all—you wouldn't have heard the music, you know."

Horton laughed. "What a wonderfully accurate description! But I plead not guilty to the better part of all that. I was too anxious to see this valley before sunrise from above the Mountain Drive, for me to risk an all-night session at the club. And the highballs, too—I'm not guilty; it spoils a good game, you see. But you must have a brother?"

"Yes, there he is, four places down on the other side. . . . I was born here too!" She flashed a mischievous look at him, sidewise. "I know everybody's history, everybody that has always lived here, and a whole lot about every one that hasn't."

"Really!" he said. "I am divided between terror and curiosity. First of all, what are the things you have learned about me? I have been here two weeks."

She pursed her small mouth, lifting her chin saucily. "Well, first of all, you are a bachelor and very well off, consequently much in demand—a wealthy unattached is as rare a joy as a rain in August. Next you come of a good family, vouched for by the Toots, so you travel with the only set—though the family is not necessary at all—the money is quite

enough. Then, incidentally, you are—" she stole a look at him again—"fair looking and—but that's enough."

His lip lifted slightly. "I gather from all that that my bank account is somewhat exaggerated."

"You're an orange king aren't you?" she asked, laughing slyly at his expression.

"Not to my knowledge," he declared, smiling at her again. "What does that mean? I saw it in the hotel personals as applied to me."

"Why you have a million or so acres in oranges, you own a packing-house, a town, and—and I don't remember the rest——?"

"It is just as well," he remarked, a trifle shortly, and then he laughed at her teasing attitude. "I am not going to ask you any more about myself—I think I prefer to hear about other people."

"Do you? Well then, do you like it here?"

"I think it is one of the most beautiful places I have ever been in."

"But socially?" she insisted.

"I don't know it socially," he said. "I know the Toots, they were steamer acquaintances of mine; I met them years ago, and found that they knew my family. They have introduced me to the clubs and some of the people here—they have been very kind—but I am not particularly fond of this sort of thing. I live pretty quietly, usually, at my ranch."

"We're not just your kind, I fancy," said the girl, with a touch of seriousness. "You see we represent the first generation of staples, that's the trouble." She raised her fork slightly from her plate, surreptitiously pointing with it. "Just across the way with three double chins is flour; four down, sugar, and around the end of the table, with his neck rolling over his collar, is beef and pork; then four below me, petroleum, and four beyond you, fertilizer. They're all kings—that is they are out here—they wouldn't even be dukes in New York, so they prefer the Pacific Coast. Oh, then just add a sprinkling of the younger ones who are forgetting that they run their automobiles on Papa's oil or lard or flour, and just a few who don't belong to royalty at all, but do know something about their great grandfathers, and you have us complete."

"Not quite, I hope," Horton said.

"Oh, well, there are a few exceptions," Miss Knight admitted, "but they don't count at all—they are not society. There are only two classes here in Moneta Valley, society and—nothing."

"You should know."

"I do. It is pretty much the same everywhere out here, but this is the worst of all. Still, you ought to know, you have lived in California for years—in the orange region—haven't you?"

"Yes," Horton answered, "and I think you are

too sweeping in your statement. This is not typical. The trouble here is idleness—mostly. There is not a busier State in the Union than ours, and in a community where people are busy this sort of thing does not thrive, no matter how much wealth there is. I come from a region where the day is not long enough for all we want to accomplish, and our social atmosphere is normal. Such a condition *is* typical of California. It is unfair for others to judge us, or for us to judge ourselves by the antics of a few millionaires who come to a smiling climate to play about for a season. They collect here in your valley, a certain class do, for there is everything to tempt them, but one only needs to walk through your naturally beautiful little town over there beyond the boulevard, to realize that in spite of the money they are supposed to bring into the place, they actually sit as an incubus on its progress, because the atmosphere they create kills anything like public spirit. Excuse my criticisms, please, but I think it is hardly fair to judge a whole body by an excrescence or two." Horton spoke with some warmth.

Miss Knight shrugged impatiently. "I haven't made a study of the subject," she said, "but I know this place well enough; the good Spanish should have had a premonition and called it Santa Moneda. I am a good deal more interested, however, in the things I don't know—have you really all the miles of oranges

they say you have—and a packing-house, and the rest——?" Her manner was frankly curious, and Horton looked amused.

"It is a gross exaggeration," he assured her.

"The Toots say it's so," she contended.

"Do they," he said, indifferently, and then his very pleasant blue eyes twinkled as he added, "but if you are really so much interested I shall be delighted to give you more accurate information to add to your store."

"Oh, would you," she exclaimed, unabashed. "Of course I am interested. Can I go on asking questions?"

"Yes, surely. There may be some I shall not care to answer, but I reserve the right."

"Well then, are you really worth several millions? And are you going to buy Mira Alta, and bring a bride here to Moneta Valley and spend most of your time here? Then this you needn't answer because it's rude—how old are you?"

Horton laughed out at her string of eager questions. "I cease to wonder at your fund of information," he said, "and I will answer all your questions—and more, so that after this you may speak with authority. To begin with I am a native Californian like yourself—I was born in Los Angeles, and spent my early boyhood there. My family went back to New York then, and I went to school in the east. When I was twenty,

as I had no one then to dictate to me, I travelled about wherever the fancy took me for three years, and finally came back to California and settled down in the orange region where for years I have lived as a respectable, law-abiding citizen. In spite of the Toots and the hotel personals I assure you that I am not worth even one million, I have no idea of buying an estate like Mira Alta and living an idle life, and I shall stay here only until I feel that I must go back to my ranch, which by the way is only a two hours' journey from Los Angeles. Then I will truthfully add that I am just thirty-eight years old, and that I have not the faintest idea of marrying anybody at all. Was there anything more?"

"Yes," she said, quickly, "who do you think is the prettiest woman you have met here? . . . Mrs. Peek?"

Horton gave her so steady a look that in spite of her *sang-froid* the color rose in her cheeks, and he continued to look at her until she dropped her eyes. More than once before he had found it an effective method of expressing degrees of admiration without committing himself by words.

"She is the beauty here—she and Miss Talworth," the girl explained, a little hastily.

"Are they here to-night?" he asked, with no appearance of interest. "I have met Mrs. Peek."

"She is right down our row, looking this way now.

She has tried several times to speak to you." She leaned back in her chair while Horton bent forward, smiling and bowing in answer to the gracious glance of a handsome woman several seats further along. She was dark-eyed and red-lipped, with a waxen skin and beautiful shoulders, but Horton's eyes left her, and he continued to lean forward, looking down the length of the table.

"Who is the little slight woman beside our host?" he inquired.

"The skinny woman with a laugh like a bass-viol? That is Mrs. Totten. This dinner is given for her—didn't you know? She talks like a Kentucky jockey, always wins at bridge, is, according to her own statement, 'a dead game sport,' and has three of the prettiest little children you ever saw."

"Ah," Horton said, his lips twitching slightly, "and the short woman, two this way, with the Irish eyes and crooked mouth—I have seen her before somewhere."

Miss Knight laughed. "That is Mrs. Quakenboss. Her husband feels the pulse of the millionaires, and gets along very nicely, and she gives birthday rings to their babies, and dinner parties to those who are worth while. She is terribly energetic. She keeps a watchful eye on poor Quakenboss, and there is never a feminine frailty that escapes her attention. She is so keen she even scents them before they exist."

Miss Knight's brilliant eyes danced. "She is invaluable to us," she declared.

Horton laughed a little. "And the tall, light-haired woman this way? I was watching her to-day; she swims well."

"Oh, she's one of our divorcées."

"Really! You speak as if they were numerous."

"They are. There are four here to-night. To have a really gay time here, one must either be a divorcée, or pose as being expectant of becoming one. There are eight divorcées here to-night that have married again, beginning with our hostess; that with the four that are still at large, makes twelve—twelve out of twenty-four—there are just twenty-four couples here; a good showing isn't it?" Her manner was half scornful, half flippant. "A poor creature like myself with no past has awfully little chance of a future!"

Horton avoided making a reply; his companion's remarks only served to accentuate his feeling of distaste. He thoughtfully scanned the long dinner-table; it was a very typical collection of men and women who from natural inclination, and in most cases as the result of plethoric purses, had come together to form a set described by the usual "smart," "fast," and like adjectives. They had gathered in this Pacific Newport, building for themselves expensive homes, choosing for their estates the loveliest spots in the most beautiful of valleys, the blue of the nearby mountains

as a background, the smiling Pacific at their feet. Horton was a good listener, and an intelligent observer, and he had spent his two idle weeks to some purpose. He had found the ideals and standards of the other idle men about him more than usually unattractive and their round of pleasures unintelligent certainly. He smiled slightly as he contemplated the women. The remarks of his companion were not so aside from the mark. Taken as a whole they ran a close second to the men. Horton reflected that in fourteen days' time he had heard more scandal hinted or plainly spoken than during any previous fourteen months of his life; the very air was redolent of it. It persisted in tainting the salty sweet breath of the ocean, and coloring the green and brown of the undulating valley, even following one up the mountain trails, for guide and chance companion do not always have the gift of silence. Horton had had too eventful a life to look anything but leniently on human frailties—he had too many shortcomings of his own to deplore—but the purely fastidious in him revolted from inane vulgarity of the sort that a fat purse and the lack of moral responsibility begets. This was the second dinner-dance at which he had been a guest, and he vowed to himself that it would be his last. It had the usual characteristics of unlimited champagne, unintelligent conversation, and a country club menu varied by importations from two cities. He

was glad that the girl at his side expected but scant attention; he would be off at the first opportunity and take his time along the moon-lit boulevard, with only the misty lap of the water to break the silence.

Miss Knight was busied with the heavy-faced, flushed youth at her right, and Horton remembering that he had met his left-hand neighbor earlier in the evening, turned toward her. He even remembered that her name was Mrs. Conté. She had struck him as very pretty, by far the freshest and most natural looking woman at the table, and he felt a sense of relief as she smiled at him from under her lashes. The very pink and rotund young man who had brought her out had so far seemingly absorbed her attention, a conversation low-toned and earnest.

Horton made a brave effort at conversation with his neighbor, and he was the recipient of many soft smiles, well championed by glances from her dark-lashed eyes, but real stupidity palls even with such accompaniments, and Horton decided that for an hour and a half's sitting he would prefer Mrs. Peek's exotic graces, or Miss Knight's acidity, and even Mrs. Totten's basso profundo. That lady punctuated the numerous courses by smoking a cigarette, throwing back her head and puffing the smoke toward the ceiling, her thin neck stretched to its utmost capacity, like an Italian of the slums swallowing macaroni. It was not exactly a pretty manœuvre, but quite

"sporty," and consequently interesting. Horton glanced at his hostess, who was also smoking, a cigarette caught tightly in one corner of her mouth, the other open to conversation, her cold blue eye glancing down the table. It was a sudden change in her expression that drew Horton's attention to the seat at the left of his host. It had been empty so far, but some one had slipped in and taken it. When Horton looked, the new-comer was seating herself, bending and turned toward her host, and he had a view of a crown of dark hair, that as the light of the candelabra touched it, glinted like bronze. He felt a sudden clutch at his throat that stopped his breath, and then he sat quite still, his eyes dilated, his tanned cheek gray. She had raised her head and was sitting upright now, bowing and smiling slightly in answer to the greetings of those about her. Her large gray eyes travelled slowly toward Horton and he knew that the next moment they would reach him, and he would be absolutely incapable of either sign or movement. Then Miss Knight leaned over to speak to his left-hand neighbor, and shut off the slowly moving eyes from his fascinated gaze.

"Do you see she has come," she said.

"Yes," Mrs. Conté rejoined, with more animation than Horton had been able to arouse in her, "and did you see Alma Toot's face?"

"Mad, yes," Miss Knight said, scornfully, "but

she never stays angry with money very long—and Richie says it really was a breakdown."

"Well what was she out automobiling just at dinner time for?" Mrs. Conté asked.

"Why she had forgotten the dinner, of course," Miss Knight said, impatiently, "but there was a breakdown too—just happened to be, so she had a good excuse. . . . We are talking about Miss Talworth," Elsie Knight explained, including Horton now in the conversation. "She just came in—down there by Mr. Toot. It was she who kept dinner waiting. She has a way of forgetting things like that unless Mrs. Silence looks after it—by the way it was Kate Talworth you were to bring out not me." Horton's eyes were on his plate and he made some indistinct reply. The light in the room was glaring, and beneath his dazed eyes the white cloth of the table with its sparkle of glass and silver, lifted and swayed. Miss Knight looked at his set face in surprise, but Mr. Ferrell claimed her attention.

"Look at Burke!" he chuckled. "He has sat in the dumps all evening—now behold the difference! April sunshine isn't in it!" To Horton the words came distinctly. He was gaining hold on his reeling faculties by the strongest exertion of will possible to him in those dizzy moments. He began to wonder vaguely if he had been about to faint. Mrs. Conté, like Miss Knight, was occupied by her other neighbor, and Horton was given time. The color gradually

came back to his face until he flushed to scarlet, and his eyes grew brilliant. He looked like a man who had repeatedly emptied the sparkling glass before him, but Miss Knight was observant and she had noticed that he had scarcely touched his wine. She hastened to bring her attention back to him, but by that time he was prepared for her. Her methods were usually direct ones.

"What was the matter?" she asked. "You looked ghastly a minute ago and now——" She eyed him keenly.

"Did I?" he said. "I am tired of sitting still—do you hear that two-step in there, Miss Knight? How much more eatables do we have to have?"

"Salad, ice cream, and coffee," she said, looking surprised. "Why, do you like to dance so much?"

"I don't like to sit still when my feet have the nervous fidgets as they have now. I should like to dance that thing in there from beginning to end, and the next, and the next after that," he had flung his arm over the back of his chair and drawn himself up, looking down at her. His sunburnt skin was still flushed, his large mouth twitching in a smile, and his eyes under their straight brows were as blue as the June sky at midday. He looked ten years younger than the quiet, courteous man of the earlier evening. He lifted his head impatiently, and a lock of his fair hair fell across his forehead. The network of wrinkles at the corners of his eyes, that lent to them their

look of experience, were smoothed away; there was something joyous and boyish in his whole attitude, and the girl felt its charm instantly.

"Is that the effect music has on you?" she said, the tight lines about her mouth relaxing. "The rest of them here don't care to dance until after midnight —the room doesn't appear to be stationary by that time, so it doesn't matter—but you are not a young-old bachelor!"

"But I am ordinarily—what is going on at our host's end of the table?"

"Oh Burke is going to sing." The lines came back to her mouth, and the acidity to her tones. "He has found his voice now that Miss Talworth has appeared."

"That is the handsome girl who just came in? Is he interested—you mean he is engaged to her?"

"He would like to be," she said, sharply, "but she's not a girl—she is over thirty."

"I stand corrected," Horton said, with some of his usual manner. "Does she live here?"

"Yes—that is part of the time—nobody who has a million or so stays here all the time. Though we're rapid we're monotonous." Her air was scornful.

Horton's eyes narrowed slightly. "You mean that she is like the rest here—that this is her set?"

"No," said the girl, grudgingly, "she is different—really—but she is rich like them."

Horton smiled again. "Perhaps her millions are like mine, a matter of the imagination?"

"No," said Miss Knight, soberly, "she is really rich. She came here, it must have been nearly fifteen years ago, with old Talworth, her uncle, and that's how I know about her age. She looked almost the same then as she does now. The old man was an invalid, half paralyzed, and she took care of him. He was an awful old thing, cross and crabbed as an old bear, and she never went anywhere, or saw anybody—just waited on him. He would be here for a short time and then off to some sanatorium for the rest of the year; she must have had a life of it. Father, I know, used to say that Mr. Talworth was a wonderfully clever old man, and crippled as he was, he looked after his money interests entirely himself. He got some of the best oil lands in the State into his hands, and when he died he left it all to her. I used to see them out driving together—she so pretty, and he so yellow and wrinkled; they came for a little while year after year. I used to feel sorry for her—every one did."

"It couldn't have been a pleasant life—how long ago did Mr. Talworth die?" Horton asked.

"About four years ago. He died here, and every one said she would go away, but she didn't. She really seems to love the place. She built a beautiful bungalow, right down by the ocean—quite near the

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club here, and Mrs. Silence lives with her. Mrs. Silence has been coming here ever since I can remember; her home is in Los Angeles and everybody knows her. It was after they became friends that Kate Talworth began to go out here. People have made a lot of fuss over her, but I don't believe she cares a penny about them. I often think that the reason every one here seems to think so highly of her is that she never thinks about them at all. Once in a long while she gives something that's a little bit nicer and more expensive than any one else, and the rest of the time she does as she likes. Mrs. Silence is very fond of society, and she insists on Kate Talworth's going out a good deal too; but she would rather ride horseback and just work in her garden, I think, than do anything else. She has a beautiful garden on the side of the house that is away from the ocean."

"She appears an interesting character—but she has never married?"

Miss Knight flashed him a sidelong look from her brilliant eyes. Then she pursed her lips, her air judicial. "I suppose she will marry some day and surprise every one. They say that Richard Allison, Mrs. Silence's nephew, is devoted to her, but I fancy taking care of that old man cured her of thinking of marrying—he was a terror!"

"But surely she has had many opportunities," Horton insisted. "Mr. English for instance."

Miss Knight flushed, and then she gave her exaggerated shrug. "Burke's poses interest us, they are so original. He despises women, you know—says they are all immoral by instinct, and nice things like that, but he would like to succeed in this case." The gleam appeared in her eyes again—"However, he would not be difficult to distance for he hasn't even made a start."

Horton's flush deepened and his lip lifted, but he did not trouble to answer her. His attention had apparently been hers, his ears took in the sense of her remarks, but his thoughts were with the information she had rather ostentatiously given him, and his most urgent desire was to look again toward his host's end of the table. In a few moments it would be too strong for him, and he doubted if he had the power to control his expression.

"Burke sings for us now," Miss Knight remarked, "and next we will have a speech welcoming dear Mrs. Totten, and then we can go in and dance." Horton did not hear her any more than he heard Mr. English's mixed tenor harping on the delights of "Marlebay." He could restrain his desire no longer, and had sought her face.

Kate Talworth was leaning back in her chair, her eyes lowered, and Horton studied every line and soft curve. She looked much the same as the girl who almost fifteen years before had smiled at him from

her seat in the palm-hidden corner. The pallor and look of weariness was gone, and her face was fuller, the warm tint of health in her cheeks. As he gazed he realized that she did look older, but not by fifteen years, nor half that number. She was wearing black with a touch of jet, and her neck and shoulders looked snowy white in contrast. It was her full throat, and the lines of shoulder and bust that suggested maturity far more than her face. Hers was not a type that would show age easily.

Horton gazed long and fixedly, and had his companion not been busied with reflections of her own as she half-scornfully listened to Mr. English, his complete absorption would not have escaped her. It was only when his scrutiny had lasted so long that Miss Talworth's attitude suggested a consciousness of it, that he looked away into the brightly-lighted ballroom. Would the interminable dinner never reach a conclusion?

When at last they filed out into the next room, Horton promptly forsook his companion, taking a position near his hostess. He had determined that he would seek an introduction. Miss Talworth was one of the last to leave the dining-room, and she came in with Mr. Toot, going directly to the hostess. Horton gathered from Mrs. Toot's rather loud-voiced remarks that she was accepting an apology for an unavoidable delay, but Kate Talworth's soft, deliberate tones were lost in the chatter about her. Horton waited a few

moments and joined the group. Kate Talworth had not moved away, and whether intentionally or not, her regard was fixed on the corner occupied by the musicians, but at Mrs. Toot's, "Oh, haven't you met Miss Talworth yet?" she turned deliberately and looked at him. He extended his hand, and she gave him hers. Her manner was calm, her look collected, but the light in Horton's eyes and the lines about his expressive mouth were too patent for the gaze of the curious. He was beyond the power of speech, and Kate Talworth drew aside a little, her touch on his arm.

"Shall we go to the porch—it is so much cooler?" she asked in a low voice. Horton followed her out in silence, and the fresh, cool breath of the ocean touched his burning face. There were other couples strolling about, and they walked to the very end of the long piazza into the shadow of the huge La Marque that covered that corner.

Then Horton stopped and took both her hands. "After all these years—" he said, "ah, my God!" He bent and kissed them, not once, but many times. It was a whisper from a heart too full for many words; the insistence of passion might follow later, but in those few moments there was place only for that cry of a great longing satisfied.

The woman's eyes filled with tears, her lips trembling, and in very pity she left her hands in his. The soft throb of music reached them in their far corner,

and the restless beat of the ocean, nearer and louder, smothered his words. "I have found you again," he said. "Kate, I bore it as long as I could, and then I searched for you, but I couldn't find you—and now by a chance——" His voice had dropped, and he moved to draw her to him, but she took her hands from his clasp with an air of decision that brought him to a realization of his surroundings.

"We cannot talk here," she said. "You forget." She had stepped back into the light, and as Horton looked down into her face he could see her troubled look. The quiver of distress in her voice made her words uncertain. "I—we—cannot talk now," she repeated. "Mr. Payne, I am sorry—I wish you had not come—it would have been better as it was."

"There is only one thing in the world that will drive me away," Horton said. "I would never cause you suffering—trouble—" his voice was husky, "after all this time are the reasons the same—would I bring 'real trouble' on you as you said in your letter? It can't be so—it isn't possible!"

She stood still, thinking, and he waited in silence. "Time changes many things," she said, finally, "but my reasons are much the same—it would be unfair not to tell you so."

"Be honest with me," he begged. "If I should come to your home as others do, and ask you to give me my chance, would I be bringing the trouble upon you that you spoke of?"

"No," she said, in a low tone, "not that—but I could only cause you pain—that is the same now as then."

"You are here, you cannot escape me again, you must listen to me now. You took out of my life the possibility of any other woman—you owe me a little consideration,"—his massive jaw set,—"if you will not have me—well, I must bear it, but lose you out of my life again, *I will not.*"

A man had come out of the ball-room, and stood looking up and down, then came toward them. "It is Mr. English," Kate Talworth said, hurriedly. "The first dance is almost over; he is coming for me."

"I suppose so," Horton muttered, bitterly, "and are you going to leave me like this?"

"No," she said, hesitating, "I have been thinking—I am going down to Los Angeles—day after to-morrow—but if you would come to see me——?"

"When?" Horton said, quickly.

"To-morrow evening. I shall be at home."

Horton stopped. "I will say good-night then, I cannot go back there—into that crowd."

She stood still also, for Mr. English was near. "I wonder if you would go back, just for a little while, and dance once or twice with Miss Knight? It would please me if you did," her manner was pleading.

"Kate!" he said, laughing, but his voice shook. "There is only one thing in the world I will not do for you, and that is to disappear entirely."

III.

A PLEA

"I KNEW you would appreciate it," Kate Talworth said. "I love every inch of the place."

"It is beautiful—beautiful!" Horton repeated. They had passed through the long low-ceilinged living-room and stopped a moment in the glazed porch, then taken the gravelled path to the top of the bank above the ocean. Horton had looked out over the dimpling expanse of water, that the after-glow of sunset tinged with gold, then down upon the white stretch of beach below. It was low tide, and the waves rippled up the incline of white sand, the little pebbles running after the receding water like children at play. A dozen eucalyptus of huge girth, the largest that Horton had ever seen, crowned the bank, several growing further down, almost to the edge of the beach. The view of the ocean was through their branches. To the right could be seen the line of islands, and at the left the slope and irregular sky line of Rincon, jutting far out into the water. Horton had turned as he spoke, and looked back at the long low line of the bungalow, set in its cluster of knarled live oaks. Roses climbed the stone pillars of the porch that ran the whole length of the ocean side of the house and around one end to the back, commanding there a magnificent view of

sloping wooded valley, and near-by mountains. They looked rock-studded and barren under the mid-day sun, but now they were touched by the misty pink of coming night-fall. The sunken garden, Kate's pride, was on the other side of the house, an acre of vivid green lawn and twisted live oaks, brilliant with flowers, shrubs, and vines. The shaded bank of violets still bloomed in spite of the June sunshine, and the rose-garden, that had a corner of its own, was a mass of sweet-scented bloom. As Horton had ridden along the winding roadway beneath the low-hung branches of the oaks, he had stopped a moment to breathe the tropically scented air, a mingling of rose, jasmine, and lemon blossom, shot through by the heavier dead-sweet of a datura. He had admired the artistic line of roof, and glimpse of latticed window, an irregular outline embraced in the sheltering green of the oaks, the pallid gray of the giant eucalyptus trunks as a background. He had thought then as he did now with Kate beside him, that it was a setting well suited to her, luxuriant, but touched by the dignity and mystery of the ocean. As he looked down on her he hoped that the light in the sky would last a little longer, that he might not lose the warm glint it gave her hair. He had never seen her in white before, and he was wondering with a lover's interest if the black of the previous evening or this creamy tint of lace made her skin the fairer. She had received him cor-

dially, inviting him almost at once to come for a view of the ocean before night-fall, talking brightly to him as she pointed out the boundaries of her home.

"The greatest beauty of it is that no one can shut out our view," she said. "No one will build off there in the hollow, for they would be near the stable, and beyond the garden there is a rise that will conceal everything but the very tip of a roof. I used to come and sit up here on the bank, and go down to the beach, and just long for this piece of land. I bought it the first moment I could. Do you hear that?"

"What is it?" said Horton, who had heard nothing but her voice and was conscious of nothing but the curve of her lips, and the downward sweep of her lashes as she talked. She pointed toward the stable. "It is Abdulla," she said, with laughter in her voice.

"Abdulla?" Horton repeated, absently.

"The goat. That's Aunt Silence's domain over there." Horton was aware now of the disgruntled "bah" that came faintly up to them. "Aunt Silence wastes hours down there, just as she says I do in my garden. Abdulla is a Persian kid and this climate does not suit him."

Horton smiled with her. "What in the world does Mrs. Silence want with a goat?"

"I don't know," Kate said. "She has sixteen Chinese chickens that won't lay, some huge white ducks that flew away out to sea the first day they

were let loose and didn't come back for two days, and a pair of peacocks that you can hear clear to the Country Club. She also has some strange geese from somewhere, and two other goats that are not American. I think one must be a chamois, for it climbed to the top of the garage roof the other day."

"What a collection!" said Horton. "Abdulla seems to be unhappy."

"He is," Kate said, laughing. "He has been ailing, and Aunt Silence went off with Hop and the milk-bottle directly after dinner."

"Hop!" exclaimed Horton, "and Aunt Silence! It cannot be fifteen years since that boy on the train talked about them—what was his name?"

"Richard Allison," said Kate. "He is Mrs. Silence's nephew and he is not a boy any more. I think he looks older than you do." She glanced up at him. "You are a little heavier, and, yes, your face is older, but you have not changed very much."

"Yet I feel sometimes as if I had taken that journey during some other existence, it seems so long ago. Then again it is all as plain as yesterday," he spoke half to himself, his eyes on her face.

The shadows were gathering, and she said a trifle hastily, "It is getting dark—shall we go in?"

He noticed the anxious little wrinkle that had appeared in her forehead, and he reassured her in a voice that suppressed feeling made deep. "Don't be afraid,

Kate—" he said, "you will let me call you that, won't you? I have called you 'Kate' for so long—to myself—I shall not worry you as I did last night. I didn't know what I was about—it was too much for me, seeing you that way. I have thought most of the night and all day of how wild I must have seemed to you. I feel as if I had always known you, but that is because I have loved you I think from the first minute I saw you. You might have forgotten almost that I existed—there was no reason why you should not. You showed your goodness of heart when you had patience with me, and let me come to-night, and I have no intention of abusing your kindness." He was looking at her, but she was gazing off over the ocean, her lips compressed.

"I had not forgotten you," she said, finally. "How could I forget. I have always remembered you—with gratitude—but I cannot explain myself now, any better than I did then, and I can't say one word more now than I did in my letter to you all those years ago. I do not return your—your feeling for me, but even if I loved you I should give you the same answer, and I am sorry for your sake that you ever met me—if it is impossible for you to feel any other way."

"Kate, in time, if I keep myself in hand, if I do not urge you—if I can have my chance to make you care for me——"

"It is impossible," she said, firmly. "I would do wrong if I misled you. I am just as settled in my determination now as I was then. I will marry nobody. You cannot move me now or at any other time. I felt that the sooner I told you this the better, so I asked you to come to-night."

He stood silent before her, his face paling. "I suppose I am answered," he said at length, and with difficulty. "I didn't mean to—to talk about it this evening. The only comfort you have given me is that you 'will marry nobody,' and I haven't a right in the world to ask you why. I have worried along all this time—I shall just have to go on. I am unfortunate enough to have an ideal, and I have made all sorts of mistakes trying to realize it—and I cannot give it up—not yet. But, Kate,—please look at me,—I will try to forget all this, I will not mention it again, if you will let me come sometimes, and be friendly to me."

She looked up at him quickly, and turning put her hand on his arm. "Of course I shall," she said, earnestly. "Indeed, you don't know what it would be to me to have you for a friend. Aside from Aunt Silence, and just one or two others, I have no friends. I don't count the people I know here at all; they mean no more to me than the furniture of the Country Club over there. If I were of a nature to let myself be lonely I should be terribly so sometimes." She spoke quickly for her, a little catch in her voice. "I—I

should like to thank you for putting other things out of your mind, and just—just taking me at my word." Her eyes were wide and earnest as she looked up at him, and she stood close, within the possible circle of his arm; the years of loneliness and unsatisfied longing of which he dared not speak, tugged at him, demanding satisfaction. He looked helplessly from her face to the hand on his sleeve, and his teeth came together.

"It is I should thank you," he said, indistinctly.

"Shall we go in now?" she said, gently, and they turned toward the house.

Kate stopped in the glazed porch. The paved floor was covered with a heavy rug, and several rockers were visible in the dimness. "I will not turn on the light," Kate said, "for the moon will make it light enough in a short time—you can see it there above us now, through the trees. There are shreds of fog about, and it will be a misty sort of light."

"It is growing cooler, too, Kate. I enjoy it, but will it be warm enough out here for you?"

"I sit here almost every evening," she replied, "and I am used to it, but I have a shawl here beside me."

"Let me put it around you." He lifted it from the chair beside her, and bending over wrapped it about her carefully. "It is always cool here at night —too cool for comfort," he said. His voice was low

and dull, and he drew back again into his chair, sitting with drooping shoulders and head bent. He was striving with a depression that made each word he uttered an effort. There was so little he could say that did not touch upon the forbidden subject. He felt that the best thing for him to do was to mount his horse and go back to the hotel and the misery of the night that awaited him. He had learned to dread beyond anything the paralyzing fits of depression that descended on him and sat like a leaden weight on his spirit. No woman Horton had ever known, and very few of the many men who liked and respected him, had any knowledge of the reason for the quiet man's occasionally still more marked reserve. In earlier years he had tried various methods of forgetting himself, but they were unsatisfactory hours to look back upon, and he had fallen into the habit of withdrawing into himself, and fighting out his battle unaided. He thought now a little bitterly that one tender word would be sufficient to lift him into a passion of joy, and she withheld it from him.

He was not aware of the length of time they had sat silent, until Kate said, "Do you see that lantern bobbing around there in the hollow? That is Aunt Silence."

Horton aroused himself. "Miss Knight was speaking of you last night—she said that Mrs. Silence lived with you. I thought then that you had after all kept

your promise to that Allison boy on the train—you remember you told him you would let him know where you were—but you would have none of me, Kate." He endeavored to speak evenly, but there was no hiding the hurt that lay in his words.

Kate drew an inaudible sigh, but she answered him gently. "I am afraid I was as ungrateful in my conduct to him as I was to you, Mr. Payne. It was by a chance that I met Mrs. Silence five years ago. She came to a sanatorium in the mountains, a place to which my uncle went sometimes, and we met. She was lovely to me—like a mother to a grown daughter, and I grew to love her, for no one else had ever been like that to me. When my uncle died she offered to live with me part of the time, and for four years we have been together most of the time. It was after I knew her that I met Richard Allison again. He is a lawyer in Los Angeles, and looks after much of my business for me, so I have seen a good deal of him. My uncle left me so much property to look after, and Mr. Allison is a very capable business man as well as being a lawyer. Did Miss Knight tell you about my uncle?"

"Yes, she said that he was an invalid, and that you took care of him."

"Yes, for years. He adopted me, really, and wanted me to take his name, and I was glad to do so. He was my mother's brother and when I first met you

I was coming out to him. It was all an uncertainty to me then, for I had never met him, and he did not know I was coming. He and my mother quarrelled, and he never forgave her her marriage. He never had anything to do with us. He was a very hard man, but I was only too glad when he let me stay with him. I was all alone—I had no one but him to go to. I should like to tell you about the way I have lived since —after I came to my uncle—if you care to hear?"

"Do you need to ask me?" Horton said, quickly. Kate's voice was soft and sweet, the same clear, deliberate intonation he remembered so well, and he flushed warmly as he listened to her. He could not feel that she had changed at all from the girl of his recollection. She bent toward him a little, her hands clasped on the arm of her chair, an attitude that asked for his attention, an appeal to him to dismiss hurt feelings. He felt her charm just as he had felt it on that night when she had lifted him out of dissatisfaction and uncertainty into happiness, and then vanished from his sight. The years that had passed were a dream only, and he had waked to find her unchanged, alluring, but still beyond his reach. His head lifted, his depression of the moment before forgotten.

"I was trying to come here to my uncle when you met me and helped me," Kate said. "I left Los Angeles as soon as I could, and found my uncle here.

He received me ungraciously, but he let me stay. I was willing to work for him like a servant if he would only give me a home, and he let me be his nurse—I had more patience than most. After a while he grew to like me, and was kind to me in his way. He suffered terribly sometimes, and was almost never free from pain. He grew to rely on me entirely and I was happier after that, for he needed me just as a sick child would. He used to talk constantly to me about his investments, so that I should know how to manage all the money he was going to leave me, for toward the end he told me that he was going to leave me everything, and I have tried to carry out his wishes. Since his death I have lived here most of the time with Aunt Silence, for I love this beautiful place—there is no other place like it. Aunt Silence's home is in Los Angeles, and I am going back and forth constantly, but I am happier here by the ocean than anywhere else."

"Kate," Horton demanded, abruptly, "why did you leave me as you did that night at the hotel? I have asked myself the question constantly—some things I think I understand, but not that. You know—you must have known that I loved you, and you did that to me——" Horton had lost hold on himself, his promise and his firm determination to keep guard upon himself, forgotten. He rose in uncontrollable agitation and stood over Kate, who shrank

a little in her chair, her shawl drawn up to cover her trembling lips. "Why, Kate, I was almost beside myself for months. I wanted a sight of you more than a thirsty man wants water, and I was tied hand and foot by your letter." He tried to speak more calmly. "You see, Kate, everything went wrong with me at once, for I had lost most of what my father had left me, and then I lost you. I obeyed you faithfully for a long time and then I couldn't endure it any longer and I searched for you. I did everything I could here, except to employ detectives—your letter restrained me from that—and finally I went to Eisenach and talked to Herr Tupfer. They scarcely remembered you, and could not give me your name even. You appeared to have vanished as completely as if you had never existed, and taken with you the possibility of my finding in another what I lost in you." Horton spoke jerkily in his endeavor to gain calmness. "The fact that I had lost you only made the want of you the greater. I cherished your Flemish pin as the only tangible remembrance I had of you; I could touch it, look at it night and morning. I never entered a strange room but my first look searched it for you; I never walked a street without taking note of those who passed me—it grew to be as natural a thing as to eat or sleep. I preferred a memory to a reality that would not satisfy. . . . Kate, you know you could have done with me as you liked—

I should have obeyed you—as I will now, but you left me like that! Tell me what it all means, Kate. Have a little confidence in me—let me judge a little for myself——" He stopped, his breath coming quickly.

She was silent, then she said, quietly, "I cannot tell you."

"You cannot, or is it that you will not, Kate?"

She drew the shawl from her lips, and raising her head, looked up at him. "Perhaps it is that I will not," she said, evenly. "Did you mean what you said a short time ago, when you spoke as if we might be friends? That would mean that you would have to pass over much that you did not understand. I believe it would not be possible to you—it is asking too much of yourself. I repeat that I can give you nothing but what I offered a few minutes ago, and my friendship will not satisfy you, or make you happy. It is for your sake that I beg you to give up any thought of me."

Horton was silent, looking down into her lifted face. "I cannot do it," he said at last, in a low voice, "I must take anything you will give me—I will take it—gladly—without question or complaint—after this."

"You would be trying to do a thing that will be too difficult for you," Kate said, earnestly. She rose and stood before him. "I shall have to speak more plainly to you—and I will hurt you, but you *must*

understand. I meant what I said when I told you a short time ago that I should like to have you for a friend; I wanted to show you that I was grateful to you, as grateful as I was when I wrote to you, all those years ago. There is so much that I like in you, I would trust you in many ways, but when you urge me, when you speak and look as you do sometimes, for you have not changed at all, you frighten me—you remind me of—of things that hurt me—that I want to forget——"

"Kate!"

"I know, but I must tell the truth to you. You cannot understand me at all—that is my misfortune. I have always had a feeling that I had done you a wrong, and yet I cannot see how else I could have acted—or how else I can act now. I have said all I can to you—I have told you the truth about my feeling to you——" She stopped, looking up at him, her hands twisting the fringe of her shawl, her voice trembling in its earnestness.

"You have told me the truth—certainly—" Horton said, his lips stiff. "It is better always to know how one stands—you want to be kind to me—you like me enough to offer me your friendship, you trust me enough for that, for a friendship with reservations; it is something, Kate, but when it comes to vital things, to the things that matter, you distrust me. I am tangled up in your mind with things, or a person, or

circumstances that are painful to you—it is that makes you turn from me. It was your attitude back at the time when I first met you, and it is just the same now. You will explain nothing to me—I must feel my way in the dark, but, Kate, I am a determined man, and I have waited a long time. You may never love me—I don't know what I have to struggle against—but *trust me you shall, and will.*" He spoke with an emphasis that shook him. Kate made no answer, but her eyes dropped from his face to the bit of shawl she was holding. Horton came a little closer to her. "Listen to me, please, Kate," he said. "I give you my word that from this day I will not question or urge—I will take what you choose to give me and be grateful—I have longed for you endlessly, and just to see you is like heaven. I only ask that you give me a chance to prove myself worthy of your entire trust. If you will be patient with me and give me time I can do that much—I know it. . . . You will not drive me away, Kate?"

"No," she said, in a low voice, "I would not do that."

"I may see you—talk to you—if there is anything I can do for you, you will let me do it?"

"Yes."

He laughed, uncertainly. "Shake hands with me then, please, Kate," he begged. "I am going away now—you have had enough of me for one evening."

A Plea

"You damn liar," came in plaintive tones from the shadow in the direction of the stable. Kate gave a hysterical gasp, and Horton cried sharply, "Who was that?"

"Hop," Kate said, in a smothered voice, "and Aunt Silence—see them?" Two figures were emerging from the gloom into the dim light; they were not far from the porch. Mrs. Silence's was presumably the short and broad figure, and Hop's the indistinct body possessing two spidery bow-legs. They came almost to the corner of the porch, and stopped. Kate touched Horton's arm. "Listen," she said.

"I ought to have stayed," said Mrs. Silence, her rather metallic voice guilty of a quaver. "I suppose he had an agony inside all afternoon. It's all my fault."

"Heap lie!" Hop ejaculated, consolingly.

"What th——" Horton began in angry surprise, but Kate touched his arm.

"You don't know anything about it, Hop," Aunt Silence said, "you never had appendicitis."

"Him damn fool—die heap quick," said Hop, sorrowfully.

"I know, Hop. Poor baby—and I playing bridge!"

"You stay bed for breakfast," Hop tempted. "I makee cakes—velly good! I bring em up."

"I couldn't eat them," said Mrs. Silence, with a sigh. "It's no use Hop."

"You damn liar," Hop repeated, dejectedly. "Him damn fool."

"Yes, I know," said Aunt Silence. "He was a dear," and she sighed again. "Good-night, Hop."

Hop grunted, and Aunt Silence turned to the porch. She had reached the steps when he called, "Missee Silence!"

"Yes," said Aunt Silence.

"I makee cakes?" His voice was cajoling.

"No," said Aunt Silence, firmly. "I couldn't swallow a mouthful."

"Ugh!" grunted Hop, and he grunted again sorrowfully, as he went on to the kitchen.

"Come," whispered Kate. Horton followed her around the porch to the back, and there they stopped. "Aunt Silence wants to meet you," Kate said. "She thinks she used to know your father in early days in Los Angeles. She spoke of knowing a Payne family who used to live out on the heights, Summit Hill I think she said, but it is not a part of the city I know. You must meet her, but not to-night. Evidently poor Abdulla is dead, and Aunt Silence will be wretched. Hop was trying to comfort her."

"I should like very much to meet Mrs. Silence," Horton said. "It must have been our family she knew, but, Kate, when will you let me see you again?"

A Plea

"I must go to Los Angeles to-morrow, but I shall be gone only two days, I think—when I come back?"

"May I come in a few days to see if you have returned? You will not stay long, will you, Kate?" He held the hand she gave him, studying her face in the dim light.

"I shall want to get back as soon as I can," she said.

"You are so pale, dear, I have tired you out."

"No," she said, with an effort. "It is this sickly light." She drew her hand from his, but she did it gently. "Good-night. I shall watch here until you get your horse." She stepped back from him into the shadow, and Horton went on down the steps. She stood until he had ridden well into the darkness of the live oaks and then she came out to the light, her face raised to the scattered stars, that gleamed fitfully through their covering fingers of fleecy cloud; in the misty light she looked white and very tired.

IV.

THE HOUSE OF DECAY

It was early in the afternoon of the next day that Kate Talworth boarded a Summit Hill car with the half-formed intention of seeing a part of Los Angeles that she did not know. She had come down from Moneta on an early train, and completed in an hour the business for which she had come. She had written a letter afterwards to Richard Allison, and lingered over a solitary lunch at the Alexandria, wondering vaguely what she should do during the long afternoon before her. She had time to take a return train that day to Moneta, but she had no desire to do so. The same reasons that made her in no haste to return to Moneta, deterred her from telling Richard Allison that she would be spending that evening in Los Angeles. She felt wretchedly depressed. It was no new anxiety that weighed upon her, it was a distress of years' duration, but Horton Payne's sudden appearance had vivified it. His voice, his bearing, the whole look of him, was too strong a reminder of the past. His apparent unconsciousness of the lapse of years made the unhappy days of her girlhood merely a thing of yesterday and the day before. Into what sort of forgetfulness had she tricked herself by

presuming to dream that she could make a future into which the past would not enter? It was as well that in Horton's reappearance she had been given a reminder of the fact that in calculations of the future one should not discount the past.

It was not only of herself that Kate thought as she listlessly made a pretense of lunching. She had the understanding of suffering that experience brings, and Horton's look of pain hurt her intolerably. It had made the last two days a torment to her. She had never conceived it possible that he would carry with him through years a memory of her that to him was as fresh as an occurrence of the day before. She had always feared that chance would bring them together again, and had shrunk from that possibility as she did from everything that might remind her of past suffering. How could she best meet his determined appeal to her? She had no belief in his power of restraint, and it would all end in her hurting him terribly. "You will not drive me away from you?" he had begged of her, and yet what other course was possible to her? To hurt anything that had the power to suffer was actual torture to Kate. It did violence to her nature, the strongest characteristic of which was an immense capacity for tenderness. The fact that she did not love Horton, that through no fault of his he reminded her of features, attitudes, inflections of voice, that stirred a terror in her amounting almost

to fascination, only made her pity for him the greater. Kate had miserably pondered her problem, not hers alone but Horton Payne's and Richard Allison's as well, and saw no solution that promised happiness to any of them.

She had gone out to the street finally with the feeling that she must move about, and seek some interest. She could not spend the afternoon as she had the previous night with nothing to distract her thoughts. As she walked aimlessly along Broadway a car bearing the sign "Summit Hill" passed her. She remembered Aunt Silence's description of the Summit Hill region, and it occurred to her that she might spend the afternoon seeing a part of the city that would be new to her. It might take her thoughts from painful subjects.

They had skirted the Angel's Flight, and coming up behind it climbed to the crown of the next hill, before Kate paid much attention to her surroundings. But here the view she gained of the city spread out below her was so striking that she left the car in order that she might stand and look out upon it, and enjoy it more fully. To the extreme left and behind her were the hills, partly built over, a curious miscellany of dwellings, shanties and chicken pens in the hollows, here and there a street of new bungalows topping the higher ground, and an occasional house of older architecture, half hidden by big peppers and

tall eucalyptus. She had seen the town of fifteen years ago stretch itself and grow, and in the last few years had watched it spring into a city; she had seen miles of streets laid out, and tract after tract built upon and shaded by quickly growing peppers, acacias, and eucalyptus, but this particular view was quite new to her, and she stood a long time thoughtfully looking out over the white city. What a vast difference between the town of 1893 that she remembered so well and the teeming city of 1908. She turned her back upon it then, and walking northward over the hills, descended into a gorge and climbed again to the crown of the next hill. There she came upon a huge rambling building and neglected grounds that interested her greatly; they were so singularly out of place in their surroundings.

Kate judged that the grounds must cover some fifteen acres or more, the house, of which she could catch a glimpse through the trees, standing about a third of the way down the slope of the hill, and presenting, even at that distance, an appearance of desolate decay. She went close to the high wire fence, and peered through the neglected growth of trees and shrubs, discovering at one corner of the grounds an attempt at a kitchen garden and a collection of ancient chicken-coops, about which stalked a few fowls; but that was the only sign of life.

It was evidently the back of the house she saw, and

Kate studied it long and curiously, unable to decide if it had once been a dwelling, or an institution of some kind. It was many-gabled and steep-roofed, the windows narrow and high, many of them boarded up, the rest containing only splinters of glass. The storms of the winter appeared to have carried off a part of the roof of the left wing, and the tops of the eucalyptus on the other side of the house might be seen through the bare rafters. It was a scene desolate in the extreme, and wholly out of keeping in that city of rapid growth. It breathed a possibility of romance, a suggestion of tragedy. Kate turned then and looked about her. Behind her was a stretch of open country, laid out into lots; on one side of the grounds into which she had been looking ran the arroyo, or gorge, she had just crossed, and on the other side was a collection of abandoned oil-derricks. She could not see what lay at the foot of the slope, for the house and the trees shut out the view.

Kate skirted the fence until she came to a roadway, directly in the centre of which was planted the sign, "No Trespassing." She hesitated, but her interest was keen, and she wished particularly to get a better view of the house. The wires that crossed the sunken roadway were bent and broken, and she parted them and entered. The drooping branches of the pepper trees shut out the sun and the view, and she kept on until the road brought her to the side of the house.

The indication of a driveway continued, leading round to the front, but Kate stopped suddenly when she reached the open, arrested by the bark of a dog and a girl's shrill voice. "Down Tiger! Down, I say," the girl cried. "You'll step on the babies—bad dog!"

Kate had turned and looked behind her in amazement. They sat well out of the shadow of the pepper trees, a bright bit of color in the warm afternoon sun, the girl in her gayly flowered Japanese silk kimono, her yard of black hair flowing over her shoulders and falling on the white outspread towel behind her, the yellow dog at her feet. She was pushing the animal from her knee, drawing the two kittens she held up to her breast. They stared unblinkingly across her round arm at the dog, and she bent her cheek to them, pinching their tiny ears between her lips.

The group struck so incongruous a note in the prevailing atmosphere of neglect and decay, that Kate stood still staring, and then moved slowly toward them. She made little noise as she walked over the dried grass, and was quite near them when the dog heard her and sprang erect with a growl, his rough coat bristling, his teeth bared.

"Tiger!" the girl commanded, shrilly. "Down, back here, I say!" She had risen to her feet and whirled about, her eyes growing wide with surprise as she gazed at the intruder.

The dog moved forward, threateningly, and the

warm color in the girl's cheek deepened, her ordinarily sleepy eyes aflame. "Tiger, did you hear me say 'back'!" she cried, stamping her foot. She bent and seized a stick that lay on the ground, and Kate winced at the blow she dealt the dog. The animal crouched and dropped at her feet, and she touched his head warningly with the stick. "You've forgotten to mind me!" she exclaimed. "Stay there, now!" She turned then to Kate, her eyes soft again in their glance, "He won't touch you now," she said, "but he is ugly—he's almost always chained. He is the kind of dog you have to beat. Tiger, come here,—you shall have your chain on you." She put the kittens down gently on the grass, and caught the dog by the loose skin on his neck, half dragging him toward the kennel a few feet away. She fastened the chain about his neck, laughing softly as the animal crouched, his jowl on his out-stretched paws, his yellow eyes blinking as he looked up at her. "So," she said, "that's better!"

Kate had stood white and speechless, watching every movement the girl had made, and when she turned from the dog, and picking up the kittens, approached her, it was the girl who spoke first. "Are you frightened yet?" she asked. "He is tied."

Kate smiled, though her lips were still bloodless, and she was trembling. "I was not so frightened as I was surprised—I never dreamed of finding any one

here; I thought the place was vacant. Who keeps the dog?"

"Anita. Did you think no one lived here?" The girl's lazy manner showed a touch of amusement.

"Certainly," said Kate. "I looked through the bushes up there by the street, and saw the house. I knew no one could be living in it, so I came in by the road—does some one live here on the place?"

The girl laughed her soft laugh. "Oh, yes! We live here—in the house."

"You! There!" Kate exclaimed. She turned and looked up at the dilapidated building, and her large, thoughtful eyes came back to the girl's face in silent questioning. At first glance she looked a child, for she was small and slight, and the full kimono and her mass of hair concealed her figure, but Kate observed now that her throat was full, and her bust rounded, the soft curve of womanhood. The languorous light in her sleepy eyes all but concealed the vivid flash that lay in their depths, just as her lazy ease of motion held but a mere touch of the lithe energy of movement that Kate had seen a moment before. Her hair and very straight brows were black, her skin clear with a touch of carmine in cheeks and lips. Her face was oval, the mouth too large for beauty, but the dimple at each corner, and the white regularity of perfect teeth redeemed it. Her eyes were perhaps her most noticeable feature, for they

were heavy lidded, set wide apart, and so dark a blue as to be almost black. The silk of her kimono was soft and rich, and the dainty high-heeled slippers she displayed when chaining the dog had caught Kate's eye. She had chanced upon a something far more interesting than the old house.

She smiled again at the girl, her eyes still grave. "I begin to think I have wandered into an enchanted garden—are you its fairy?" she asked. "I have never seen anything more lovely than the picture you made, sitting there in the sun."

The girl flushed with pleasure. "I was just drying my hair," she explained, "and if I were a fairy, I wouldn't have this for my garden." Her lip curled a little as she looked around. "It's an awful place, isn't it?"

"No, it is interesting in a way," said the elder woman, "but it is dreary—it looks as if it had been just left to go to ruin."

"It has," said the girl. "Nobody cares. Inez and Anita live in the corner of the house—on the other side—you can't see it from here—and the people who own the place never come near it."

"Then you rent it?" said Kate.

"Yes, I guess so," the girl replied, uncertainly. "Anita's lived here for years. She looks after the place."

"Then I shall have to ask her pardon for walking

in as I did, but I am not going to feel sorry for it, for you see I have met you. May I ask your name?" Kate's voice was frank and sweet, and the girl flushed again with pleasure, alive to a charm few could resist.

"Paquita Payne," she said, half shyly.

"Paquita Payne——" Kate repeated, slowly, and paused before she continued, "and I am Miss Talworth. I don't really live here in the city, but I come often with a friend. She always has so much to do here, and I have very little, so I scarcely know what to do with my time. I walk and ride about, but there is not much to see. Have you always lived here?"

"Yes, here,"—the girl nodded at the house—"and at The Sisters',"—she pointed city-ward. "Then for two years I lived at St. Mary's, at the school in San Francisco." She spoke the last with a touch of pride. "I just came home yesterday."

"I know St. Mary's," said Kate Talworth. "Were you sorry to come away?"

"No," the girl replied, softly. The color flashed into her cheeks and the light into her eyes. "No—oh, no!" she repeated. "I am glad to be back."

Kate studied the girl's half averted face with a slight compression of the lips, her eyes sombre, but her voice was very gentle. "One feels in a great hurry to begin life, Paquita; it is a pity there is so much time later on to reconsider——" She lifted her shoul-

ders, her manner changing to one of amusement. "Heavens! I mumble like a grandmother! . . . I wonder if you would let me see the front of the house? Perhaps I could reach a street if I went down through the grounds to the bottom of the hill?"

"Yes, there's a car not far from the gate down there. I'll take you around the grounds, and into the school-room—Anita's not here." She put the kittens down, and gathering the skirt of her wrapper in one hand, led the way. "I daren't take you anywhere else but just into the school-room," she explained over her shoulder, "for Inez would hear the noise."

"Perhaps I ought not to let you take me at all if she objects?" Kate said.

"If they never know, what's the difference," Paquita replied, with easy philosophy, "the place doesn't belong to them anyway." She had gone on to the wide terrace on which the house stood, turning to explain, "All this back there was garden once, rose-bushes and shrubs. When I was here, before I went away to San Francisco, a lot of the roses were alive yet, but there's only one or two left now. The road that you came down goes around here to the front of the house, and then on the terraces till it gets down to the bottom of the hill—see, you can't see when it reaches the bottom, because there are so many eucalyptus trees. It goes out to the street there, though."

They had come round to the front of the house, and Kate uttered an exclamation.

"How beautiful!" she said, "but what a pity!" The rather steep slope of the hill had been broken by a succession of terraces, partly natural, partly supported by stonework, the road winding back and forth on the terraces as Paquita had said, until it reached the hollow a long distance below. A row of huge peppers, and groups of cypress hid entirely from the front of the house the encampment of oil-derricks on one side, and on the other the grounds extended to the verge of the arroyo. There was an almost sheer drop there to the group of shanties Kate had passed on her way up, and from the house not even their roofs could be seen. From where the two stood they looked across the defile into a second gap between the hills, catching a sparkling glimpse of the white city in the far distance. In the hollow directly below them the eucalyptus had grown so tall as to shut out the view of the intervening country, but the blue line of mountains appeared above them. In the brilliant sunshine of the June afternoon, they stood out clearly, the scars and the piles of boulders showing as gray patches on the deep blue. Shrubs and flower-beds, ornamental trees and vines, and broken stone-work, all showed wilful and long-continued neglect. The vines lacked support and trailed on the ground, the trees were broken and twisted, the flower-beds masses

of weeds and tall grass. The green of winter was gone, and the yellow of summer rested on everything.

"What a pity," Kate murmured again; "it might be made so lovely. What is the name of the people who own the place?"

"The Paynes," said the girl. "They had four hundred acres, all this land about here, they have a lot of it yet, and they built this house, the part where the roof is gone, first, and made it a beautiful place—it was a long way out of town then. Something or other dreadful happened in the house, and Anita says the family went to pieces—I don't know exactly about it, but the next thing one of them had a big wing, the side in which we live, built, and it was a school for a long time—until it began to go to pieces. Then Anita came to live in it."

"The Paynes—yes—" Kate said, slowly. "I have been wondering if it were possible—and you are related to them—of course?"

"Yes," said Paquita. Then she shrugged. "But I am a poor relation, though; I haven't anything to do with all this," and she swept the ruin about them with a comprehensive gesture.

Kate made no reply, but she studied the girl's face again with her thoughtful look, her cheeks flushing; then lifting her eyes her gaze travelled along the front of the building. "I suppose these wide doors that are boarded up were put in when it was made a school?"

"Yes,—and do you see, two of the boards are loose; I'll move them and you can go in and see the school-room if you like."

Kate made a quick gesture of refusal. "Oh, no, we won't go in!" she said, and then she smiled at the girl's surprised look. "Don't you think the sunshine is nicer? If you will walk down the hill with me a little way when I go, I shall like that the best of all."

"You can look in the window then," Paquita said. "See, the board has a big crack—that is the school-room." She had gone on a few yards and stood on tiptoe, peering in through the wide crack, and Kate joined her. It was an immense room, the ceiling supported by several big white pillars. The floor was broken and littered with débris that had fallen from above, and the walls were darkened and stained by the rains of the winter, and bare of plaster in patches; it was vast and gloomy, a place of desolation. The girl looked in upon it indifferently, her rosy cheek against the rough window-sill, and Kate's eyes rested on her curiously and sadly.

"It was rather a gloomy home for you, Paquita, wasn't it? Did you play all alone in those big rooms?" she asked. They had turned away, following the road down to the terrace.

The girl gave her one of her quick looks, but the elder woman's eyes held nothing but tenderness, and

she shrugged a little with an attempt at indifference as she answered, "It was all I had. I guess I didn't mind when I was little; it was a change from The Sisters' and going to school—I hated school."

They had come to the edge of the arroyo where the road turned upon the terrace, and Kate stopped. "That is a beautiful view across the arroyo," she said. "It must be wonderful when the lights come out at night. They must be sprinkled all over the hillsides, clear through to the city. Is that your looking-out place?" She pointed to a small arbor that stood on a natural shelf a short way down on the steep side of the arroyo. An immense purple Bougainvillea covered the rustic work so that it looked scarcely more than a mound of leaves and blossom.

The color flamed suddenly in the girl's cheeks, and she stood looking down at it, hesitating for a moment; then she asked, "Would you like to see it?" Her eyes were as bright as when she had said she "was glad to be back." Kate thought that she was really beautiful when her face grew vivid as it was at that moment. "We have to go down this way," she continued, tripping down the steep bank much as if she had wings attached to her small feet, instead of high-heeled slippers. Kate followed her more slowly, and they stood on the ledge looking over the valley.

"Do you see that path?" Paquita said, pointing to the incline below them. "It goes almost straight

down, and then turns and comes out below the terraces in the eucalyptus grove. When I wanted to go down to the shanties to play with the children, I used to go that way, for Anita couldn't follow me." Her eyes were dancing, and she caught her kimono about her, standing on the edge of the ledge as if poised for flight. "Whew! it was like flying to jump and run down!"

"Please don't do it now," Kate exclaimed, more than half seriously.

"No," said Paquita, "not now." She dropped her skirts, her manner deliberate on the instant, her eyes sleepy again, her voice slow. "Look, I have brought you down to see my house—do you think it's pretty?" She had caught back the vine and drew to one side, while Kate looked in. It was a little place, built of eucalyptus logs, the roof thatched with palm leaves, and so covered with the dense vine that nothing of the framework could be seen from without. There was a rough floor of some kind that was covered with matting and a brilliant Navajo blanket; the rustic table and a wide bench were also covered with the gay blankets. There was a pile of cushions on the bench and a guitar on the table. The walls and even the roof were decorated with pampas grass, the delicate white plumes in sharp contrast to the gay colors of the bright blankets, and the red and yellow of the Japanese lantern that hung from the ceiling.

Kate thought as she looked that it was a fit setting for the warm coloring of the girl at her side.

"I cleaned house and trimmed it up this morning," said Paquita, "and then I had to wash my hair. This is my parlor. I haven't any in that musty place up there. I can come here and be away from Anita and Inez as much as I want to—won't you sit down on my couch? See, it is soft and comfortable." Kate sat down, and the girl curled herself up on the bench with a movement that had all the grace of a kitten. "See, I can lie here and look straight over into the middle of the city." It was so; the white buildings that away in the distance shone in the brilliant sun were the busiest beehives of the city, the centre of the vortex.

"You have a wonderful bower," Kate said. "I wonder if you will let me come and sit in it again with you? I told you that I come here often, and I would like when I am here again to come and see you—perhaps——" she hesitated, "if you like to motor—I could take you some time?"

The girl's eyes widened, half in wonder, half in delight. "I would love to go," she said. "I don't know anybody here—who wants to know people who live in such a place!" Her eyes were aflame. "They would think I was a *cholo* like Anita and those people down there in the arroyo—but I am not. I don't know why we live here. Inez says we must,

we're poor and have to, and she doesn't care, for she is a cripple and can't walk; but the girls I knew at St. Mary's—I never told them just where I lived, for I was ashamed of it. They thought I was better off than I was, for Inez would send me money sometimes, and I would buy things I liked to wear, like this, but then again I wouldn't have a cent for a long time—most of the time I didn't. I didn't mind such things before I went away, I was too little to think about it." She bent forward, rocking her body as she talked, her hands clasping her ankles; her expression grown eager under the elder woman's sympathetic attention. "When I was little I was alone here with Anita—when I wasn't at The Sisters'. Then Inez came, and she took me away from The Sisters' and I stayed here all the time—for over a year—until they sent me away—up to school in San Francisco. It just seemed a great big place to play in then, but when I came back it looked the way it really is—just dreadful!" She stopped, drawing her breath quickly.

"Yes," the elder woman said, softly, and with a look of understanding. "You were a child then, and now you are a woman. How old are you, Paquita?"

"I am fifteen."

"Fifteen—are you!—And—and is Inez your nearest relation?"

"She's not a relation at all," Paquita said, sharply,

"she's Spanish. She just looks after me, that's all. Mr. Payne is my relation—he is my guardian."

"You are an orphan then, dear?" Kate said, gently.

The girl's brows lowered and her mouth grew sullen in anger. "No—" she said, reluctantly. She looked doubtfully at Kate, but the flushed interest in the elder woman's face was too genuine for doubt, and the girl colored hotly. "I don't know about my father and mother," she said. "I asked Inez once and she wouldn't tell me, and I never asked her again, but she gets into a rage sometimes, and then she talks. She told me that I wasn't an orphan, that my parents had forsaken me, and she had taken me. She said that Mr. Payne was a distant relative of mine and that they had put me at The Sisters'. I don't believe a word she says—ever—" Paquita exclaimed, passionately, "but I asked Mr. Payne, afterwards, and he said it was so. If my people wanted to forsake me, they might have left me to some one who wanted me—Inez never did." She spoke bitterly, her lips trembling.

"Poor child," said Miss Talworth. Her eyes had grown wide with unshed tears. She leaned over and laid her white hand on the girl's slender brown one. "I know what it is like, you see, for I didn't belong to anybody either when I was a girl. It's not the way for a girl to be—it is the worst possible thing

for her. Do you think about the future sometimes, Paquita, and what you will do?"

"I don't—know—" the girl replied, hesitating. Her eyes had left Kate's, and she gazed out over the arroyo to the distant glimpse of city. "I can dance——" Her lips parted over her teeth in a slow smile, the dimples in her cheeks deepening. "Perhaps—I won't always belong to nobody."

Kate drew a quick inaudible breath; then she smiled. "Perhaps there is some one now?" she said, lightly.

Paquita shook her head, her eyes sleepy again, her voice slow. "No indeed," she answered, and she smiled a little. "I wore my hair down in a braid, and short dresses till this spring—then I wouldn't any longer; I'm not a baby, if I am small. Mr. Payne will be surprised when he sees me—he hasn't seen me for over a year."

"I don't think the braid and short dresses have much to do with it," Kate said a little sadly. "We some of us begin dreaming when we are babies. At fifteen I was even more of a woman than you are, Paquita, and now I am nearly thirty-two, and I am dreaming yet, I suppose." She flushed more deeply as she spoke. She paused a moment, then asked, "Is it Mr. Horton Payne who is your guardian? I know a Mr. Horton Payne."

Paquita gave her a quick look. "I don't know

him," she said. "I never heard his name before—Mr. James Payne is my guardian."

"James—Payne—" Kate repeated, with a puzzled air; then her brows lifted, her eyes widening as she looked at the girl. She rose suddenly, and Paquita sprang off the couch with one of her unexpectedly quick movements.

"Must you go?" she said, regretfully.

"Indeed I must—I ought to have started back before," Kate said, hurriedly; then she added with a return to her usual manner, "but I may come again, may I not?" Her smile was sweet in its appeal.

"Oh, I hope you will!" Paquita exclaimed. "And —and take me riding?"

"Yes indeed I shall. I am going away early to-morrow, but I intend to come back right away. . . . You see, I am alone, too, Paquita, without relatives, I mean, and I have thought while we were talking that we ought to be friends—when we know each other better. So I shall come again in a day or two, if I may." She smiled brightly at the girl, her eyes wistful.

Paquita's face grew vivid again with pleasure. "I hope you will!" she repeated, eagerly.

"Shall we go up to the terrace now?" Kate asked. "I think I will not try your 'Angel's Flight' down that path to the gate." They climbed up the bank, and said good-by. "Don't dream too many dreams,

Paquita," Kate said, in parting, and the girl dimpled and shook her head. She stood on the upper terrace, watching until the gray of Kate's gown mingled with the gray of the eucalyptus trunks in the hollow below. Then catching up her skirts she whirled and pirouetted toward the gloomy house, her eyes shining.

She paused beneath a row of upper windows that were glazed and curtained, and stood still a moment looking up. "The cat!" she said, with a return to her usual lazy manner. "Ah, bah!"

She pushed open a door and entered a small passageway at the end of which was a narrow flight of stairs. Bending and slipping off her shoes she crept softly up the steps, her movements as cautious as an Indian's. They brought her out on a landing, evidently a portion of the wide hallway that ran the length of the house. It had been partitioned off from the rest of the hallway to form a landing upon which several doors opened. The girl cast a quick look over her shoulder at one of the doors as she gently opened another that was directly opposite. She stood a moment on the threshold listening, and then entered the room, softly locking the door behind her.

V.

SCHEMES, SCHEMES!

THE room Paquita entered was large and high-ceilinged with high, narrow windows, two looking out upon the tangled growth of shrubs and dead rose-bushes at the back, the others commanding a wonderful view out over the arroyo. At this height the roofs and chimneys of the Spanish houses could be seen, and also the view down the second gorge. The walls of the room had been tinted red at one time, but much usage and several leaks from the roof had turned them a mottled brick color. The furniture was a curious collection, a mixture of old and new; two or three huge old mahogany chairs, and a couch, the upholstering ragged and worn, a wicker rocker, and a cheap iron bed with a brilliant Indian blanket for a counterpane. A rough chest of drawers, and a trunk stood against the wall, and between two of the windows was an immense old mirror in a highly decorated, wide gilt frame. The well-worn boards of the floor were without covering, but there had evidently been some attempt to make the room livable, for there were white curtains at the windows and inner hangings of red.

Paquita put her slippers on again, and taking a brush from the chest of drawers, began to brush her

long hair. It was very thick and soft in texture, and she dressed it high on her head in a loose pompadour, twisting and patting it with skilful fingers. Next she opened the trunk and took out two dresses, laying them on the bed. Then standing before the mirror she held first one and then the other against herself, carefully surveying the effect. One was light blue, and the other a flame red, fuller and longer in the skirt than the blue.

This she scrutinized for some time, turning it this way and that, her brow knitted in anxious thought. It was of silk, cut low in the neck, and made in Empire fashion, the short sleeves a mass of chiffon ruffles. She rummaged in the chest of drawers until she found a lace scarf that age had yellowed to a dull ivory tint, and laying it against the gown, she studied the effect. Then drawing the red curtains until the light of the room was subdued, she came back and throwing off her kimono, put on the gown and laid the lace across her shoulders. As she stood before the mirror she made a picture of warm beauty,—the dusky mass of her hair, the clear coloring of her skin, the dreamy light in her large eyes, her red lips, and the creamy gleam of her neck and shoulders, only half concealed by the lace. The twilight of the room softened the flame red of her gown to a warm tint, and Paquita's brow smoothed, and she smiled as she gazed at the vision of herself. She was satisfied.

As she turned from the mirror some one entered the passageway below, and came heavily up the stairs, and Paquita listened, her eyes on her locked door. The footsteps paused on the landing, and the door opposite was opened and closed, a murmur of voices following. "Anita," the girl said to herself. She took off the gown and laid it on the bed, then searching in the trunk until she found a pair of red silk stockings and slippers, she put them beside the dress. Gathering the other garments together, she thrust them into the trunk and closed and locked it. Taking a cigarette then from a box on the chest of drawers and lighting it, she stretched herself on the couch at the window, her small feet on one dingy cushion, her head on another, her body supine, every muscle relaxed. She fixed her half closed eyes on the distant glimpse of the city, and lay very still, the lifting and dropping of the hand that held the cigarette her only movement.

She lay quiet but not sleeping for a long time, and the sun had begun to dip toward the west, casting lengthening shadows on the ground, when she stirred. A quick step had sounded beneath her window, and she lifted her head, her look surprised and eager. Some one pushed open the door below, and came quickly up the stairs, pausing on the landing to knock sharply on the door of the other room. Paquita slipped her feet to the floor, her head bent, listening,

until she caught the faint "come in," and the man's greeting as he shut the door behind him. "Hello, Inez, how are you?"

She stood up a moment, undecided, glancing down at her kimono, then as if having made up her mind, sank down again on the couch, though keenly alive still to the sounds in the next room. There was a continued murmur of voices, the man's deeper tones distinguishable from the woman's. Then the voices dropped, and there was silence, at least Paquita could hear nothing, and when it had lasted a long time she became impatient, frowning as she observed the rapidly lengthening shadows without.

The silence was broken suddenly, for the man's step crossed the room, and he opened the door into the hall. "Paquita, Paquita!" he called. She did not hasten to answer, but smoothed her hair before the glass, her expression unusually sleepy.

"Paquita!" he called, more loudly.

"Yes," she answered, from her place before the mirror.

"You in your room? Come out here and say good-day to me—you know who it is don't you?" He had stepped out on the landing.

"Oh," she said, with a note of surprise, "is it you? I'll be there in a minute." She lifted the Indian blanket from the bed, and laid her brilliant gown

under it, carefully covering it, then went out to the landing.

The man had gone back into the other room, and she entered, her eyes seeking his face with a look of faint surprise. The room was a large one like her own, but the tinting on the walls was fresher, and the furniture modern and comfortable. Drawn up near one of the windows was a large wheeling chair, the back lowered so that the woman who occupied it lay almost flat. Her head was raised by the pillows so that her brilliant eyes could see the girl when she came in, and she watched her intently as she came forward and gave her hand to the man. He stood a short distance away, and the woman enveloped him in her burning gaze. He was tall and extremely handsome, his fair hair touched with gray, giving his unlined face an air of dignity, and distinction; his brow was broad, his eyes a dark blue under very straight eyebrows, the nose and face unusually good in line and contour. Even his mouth was attractive, for in spite of an inclination to coarseness, its smile was ready and frank.

"Well," he said, smiling now, as he held Paquita's hand and looked down at her, "you haven't added many inches to your height since I saw you last. . . . But look at the grown-upness of her!" He took her by the shoulders and held her off at arm's length. "Hair up and a train—say, Inez," he continued, turn-

ing to the woman, "I declare she is something of a beauty." The woman's pale lips parted over her teeth in a mechanical smile that accentuated the painful thinness of her sallow cheeks, and her eyes burned if anything more brilliantly, as they rested on the girl. She lifted her hand with an impatient gesture, and brushed back from her forehead a strand of her almost white hair. "Yes," she said, "and she's grown wise in proportion."

Paquita's sleepy eyes rested on her for a space, a gleam in their depths, and the man glanced from one to the other, laughing a little, his eyes narrowing slightly as he looked down at the girl.

"You are just the same, Mr. Payne," she said, in her slow way. "Did you bring me any candy?"

"Candy!" he exclaimed. "Bless me, I don't bring candy to young ladies! Sit down here and talk to us," he added, pushing a chair toward her. "I have something else for you, though."

She shook her head at the chair, and drawing up a stool, sat down, crossing her knees and resting her elbow on them, her chin in her hand. Taken by her the position was a graceful one, and the man's brows lowered again as he watched her. "Well," he said, "now that you are back from the convent, what next? It's too bad that times are so hard, but I agreed with Inez that the expense of St. Mary's was too much. This winter's been bad, rotten bad!" he

said, with emphasis. "Money's getting as tight as a drum, and everybody's been hard put to it—Inez did well to keep you there as long as she did." A fold had appeared in his brow, and his pleasant voice had gained edge. The woman's eyes rested on him thoughtfully.

"I don't know—" said Paquita, slowly, "would it cost much for me to stay here——?"

James Payne laughed rather shortly. "Here? No, but Inez thinks you won't be able to stand it. . . . How are you getting on with your dancing?"

Paquita stirred, her eyes widening a trifle. "Very well," she said, indifferently, "but I need more practice, and that costs."

"I suppose so," he said. "Well, I guess it will mean that you stay here for a while anyway, but if a chance offers for your getting an engagement, you would better take it." The last sentence was a question.

"Yes—" she hesitated, then added quietly, "of course."

The woman had not taken part in the conversation, but now she asked abruptly, "Who was it you were talking to, down in the garden an hour or two ago?"

Paquita looked at her questioningly. "Nobody," she said, with her air of surprise, "unless it was Tiger. Anita wasn't here."

"I heard you talking," said Inez, sharply, "and Anita saw some one go out of the gate."

"Perhaps she did," the girl returned in her slowest drawl, "but she saw more than I did then. I had Tiger loose and the kittens, and was drying my hair. Who was it Anita saw?" She continued to look at the woman inquiringly, and was answered with impatience.

"I don't know—some woman. I thought you had seen her too."

Paquita shook her head, and turning to the man held out her hand. "Now, what is it you brought me?" she asked.

"I thought perhaps you would forget about it, Miss Payne," he said, teasingly.

"Never!" she exclaimed, laughing softly.

"There then." He took something from his purse, and dropped it into her outstretched hand. It was a heavy silver ring curiously fashioned, a coiled serpent, the head flattened like a cobra's and resting on the coil so as to form a setting for a pink coral ball. It was rather coarse in workmanship, and not at all beautiful, but it was unique.

Paquita looked at it in surprise. "What a strange ring!" she exclaimed, examining it curiously.

"It was your mother's," said James Payne. "You are old enough to have it now."

"Why didn't Inez give it to me then?" Paquita asked, sharply.

A faint smile twitched the woman's lips, but James Payne's face was expressionless. "Because it didn't belong to her. Your mother gave it to me years ago," he replied, quietly. "I thought you might like to have it."

The look of doubt left Paquita's face, and she flushed. "I am glad to have it, of course I am." Her eyes were alight as she looked up at him. "Thank you for giving it to me. I'll take care of it —always."

He shrugged slightly. "The next time I come you will tell me you've lost it."

"Oh, no, I won't!"

"We will see," he retorted. "What finger will it fit?"

"I'll wear it on my third finger, on the right hand," Paquita said. "It won't stay on now, but I will wear my plain ring in front of it to hold it."

"That's a good idea—and now do you think you and Anita between you could get me a cup of tea?"

"Of course," Paquita replied. "Will you stay to supper?" she glanced inquiringly at Inez, but he shook his head.

"No, thank you, I haven't time. Just the tea, or anything else you have to drink—I am thirsty."

Paquita went out, and James Payne brought his

chair close to Inez, bending over and stroking the thin hand that lay on the shawl. "Sweetheart," he murmured softly, and leaning down he kissed her on the lips. A quiver of pain crossed her face, and she closed her eyes for a moment, lying still. He took her hand and held it, leaning his other arm on her chair, and she opened her eyes, looking into his face, a look restless and troubled.

"Why did you give her that ring?" she asked, in a low voice.

He was silent for a moment still holding her hand. "I thought it was best," he said, finally. "Kate knows that ring well."

"You have made up your mind, then?"

"Yes, I did that before I came up here."

"Of course!" said the woman, her lips twitching. He looked at her without speaking, and there was a pause.

"Paquita was lying when she said she was not talking to any one down there. She never tells me the truth if she can help it," Inez said, bitterly.

"I know it," he returned, quietly.

"She's beyond anything since she came back," Inez continued, her voice rising. "She keeps that door of hers locked, and she'll not answer or come out if she doesn't choose. Last night Anita pounded for ten minutes on it, and she wouldn't give a sign."

"She wasn't going to believe me about that ring,"

he said, thoughtfully, "and it is plain she has been doing some thinking of her own. She would rather stay here than dance for a living as I threatened—why, Enie, she will be wild over her chance—think what it will mean to her."

"She can have it, so far as I am concerned," said the woman, angrily, "but I tell you, Jim, she will give you trouble, I know it!"

"She won't have anything to make trouble over," the man replied, unmoved. "She is in the dark, and I intend that she shall remain so."

Inez moved restlessly. "Jim, don't meddle with it, don't," she said, her voice low in its urgency. "Isn't there any other way?"

"I will leave it to you if there is," he rejoined, briefly. "You know the situation. I can't hold out much longer. I must have money."

"I don't like it."

"To part with Paquita, I suppose," he remarked, ironically.

The woman's eyes blazed. "I hate the sight of her, the ——" she said, through her teeth.

He laughed to himself. "Of course." Then his manner changed. "Look here, Inez," he said, somewhat contemptuously, "don't try to pretend to me. It is not Paquita you are thinking of—is it now?" Then he laughed again and leaning over kissed the lips she strove in vain to keep steady. "Why, Enie,

Kate hates me worse than the devil, and why shouldn't she?" He got up and stood looking down at her, his hands in his pockets. "Foolish!" he said. In spite of his light manner there was an undercurrent of hardness in his voice.

"You have planned it for years," Inez said, with difficulty. "It's always that—schemes, schemes!" She moved her head restlessly on the pillow.

"Well," he retorted, more sharply. "What of it? It's not like you to flinch. Good Lord, Inez, you used to be ready enough to go the pace. You were a rare harness mate—you were! I wouldn't advise you to get notional now." His eyes had darkened and narrowed, his mouth coarsening, the open look and frank smile wiped out. The gentleman was gone completely, and something ugly had taken its place.

The woman shrank a little. "Yes, you can travel just the same as you used to, but I have to lie here and think——" she spoke in smothered tones. James Payne looked at her a moment, his brows lifting, a look of amusement growing in his face, and then he threw back his head and laughed.

"Inez! The idea of my being angry with you!" He sat down again, his manner half pitying, half caressing. "Why, Enie, when I realized my bit of good luck—when I discovered who Kate Talworth really is—I felt weak in the knees. Perhaps I haven't been put to it this winter! I have gone in too deep,

and on my word, I couldn't see any way out but to run, and how would it be for you and Paquita then? I have gone on pure nerve just about as long as I can. . . . Planned it for years! Why, of course, I have, just on general principles, but to strike such a gold mine—just now——!" He laughed softly, his face flushing. Then conscious still of her scrutiny, he leaned over and slipping his arm under her head, drew her towards him, his manner grown grave. "Inez," he said, "I know perfectly well what you are thinking; it's the same old foolish jealousy and you're wrong—*wrong,* do you hear, absolutely. Good gracious! After all these years can't you believe me when I tell you so. . . . Do I hurt your back when I lift you like this?"

"A little—" the woman gasped. He laid her back carefully and she closed her eyes, her brow drawn. He watched her closely, and under cover of his arm looked at his watch.

"I wish I could do a single thing for you," he said, as he slipped it back into his pocket. "If we come out on top, Inez, you're going to have a different place from this, and I will get the best doctor I can for you —I'll get Werner down from San Francisco."

"It wouldn't do any good, he would only say the same as the rest. . . . Jim, when are you going to Moneta?"

"Not for a week or so—not till I have been up to

the oil-fields, and had time to find out a few things. From all accounts old Talworth left her a pretty pile."

"And Paquita?"

"Oh, I'll talk to her a little when I am ready—I will find out from her before I go who it was she had for a visitor this afternoon, so don't you bother her about it. You let her alone, Inez. Just let her amuse herself about the place. She has no money has she?"

"Not a cent—she told Anita so. If she had she would spend it on silk stockings, or something else as useful," Inez sneered.

James Payne laughed. "Oh, come, Enie, you're not the one should throw stones," he said. "But don't let her have any money; she's too pretty to be going down town alone." He had risen and stood looking down on her, laughing again his almost inaudible laugh that had something cruel in its softness. "It's entertaining the way Paquita hates you," he remarked. "I think she lies to you on principle, for the pure pleasure of deceiving you, and having you know it. She is pretty straight with me usually. It's just a natural instinct showing itself, eh, Inez?" Then at her look he bent and kissed her, and the woman lifted her arm suddenly and put it around his neck, holding her cheek to his, her eyes grown dim. "Poor Enie," he whispered, softly.

VI.

ABOVE THE ARROYO

It was later in the evening and the sun had almost dropped beneath the horizon, casting its last brilliant beams through the spreading branches of the dark cypress trees, when Paquita gently opened her door and crept out upon the landing. She locked it behind her, careful of every sound. There was perfect quiet in the next room, and stepping lightly in the bedroom slippers she wore, she went to the rough board partition that separated this corner of the hallway from the rest, and kneeling, loosened two nails that kept one of the wide boards in place. Slipping them into the pocket of the coat she wore, she worked at the board, drawing it out from under the strip that held it in place at the top, and lifting it out, crawled through the narrow opening into the length of corridor on the other side. The opening would not have admitted anything less slender and lithe than her body.

On the other side of the board she had removed was nailed a strip, and using that as a sort of handle, she gradually moved the board back into the opening, leaving the partition to all appearances intact. She worked quickly and accurately, as if skilful from practice; then turning she looked down the corri-

dor. It ran the whole length of the house with numerous doors opening upon it, and ended in a wide arch that had at one time been a large window, but now was boarded up. It evidently gave upon the west, for the setting sun shone red through the cracks of the boards.

Half way down the corridor was another wide, high archway, and Paquita moved carefully toward it. There was need of care, for the flooring was loose and rotten, in several places so broken that Paquita could look down through the holes into the vast school-room below. She kept close to the wall, evidently familiar with every step of the way, till she came to the high archway. Here the wide stairs came up from below, and turning led up to the third story. The steps, like the floor of the corridor, were broken, some of them gone altogether, but Paquita picked her way lightly and cautiously, and gained the hall below in safety. This hall, like the one above, was wide and high, running from front to back of the house. The great doors that led into the school-room were closed, and the front entrance boarded up, so that it was almost dark here; but Paquita knew her way about. She lifted down from a niche in the wall a cobwebbed bottle, and taking a candle from her pocket inserted it into the neck of the bottle.

Next she took the two nails and some matches from her coat pocket and placed them in the niche beside

the bottle. "The rats won't get them there," she murmured, laughing quietly. Going back to the steps she seated herself and took off her bedroom slippers, replacing them with the red silk ones she took from the other pocket. "There," she said, standing up. She gathered her cloak closely about her, and going to the entrance moved aside the two loose boards, and creeping through, drew them to behind her. She stood in the stone-paved vestibule without, and the terraces lay below her, golden in the evening light.

She crossed the driveway, and ran lightly down the slope to the next terrace, then turning went on to the edge of the arroyo, stopping behind a ragged mass of bush acacia just above the little arbor. The spot was well hidden from the house by intervening shrubs and trees, and she drew her cloak about her, sinking into a sitting posture, her knees drawn up to her chin, her hands clasped about them. Wrapped in her blanket-like covering, her face a dusky pallor in its setting of black hair, her eyes wide and watchful, she looked a creature of the forest that might break into guttural speech, or creep on all fours deeper into the shadow.

She was watching the strip of path that skirted the steep slope below the arbor and led into the eucalyptus grove. It was very still about her, not even the twitter of a bird breaking the silence, and the voices of the Spanish children in the arroyo, and the screech of

a distant street-car as it turned a sharp corner, came distinctly to her ears. There floated up to her the clear tinkle of a mandolin, accompanied the next moment by the softer notes of a guitar, a measure light and airy. The girl turned quickly, looking down into the arroyo. Directly below her in the hollow was a red-roofed cottage, more decent in its appearance than some of the others, a patch of green before it, and a tall palm in the rear.

"Old Valdez," Paquita whispered. "It's Tuesday and they'll practice just as they used to." Her face brightened with pleasure, and she rocked gently, in time to the gay measure. It was the last drop in her cup of anticipation, and her eyes shone as they went back to the strip of path below.

A man's figure had detached itself from the surrounding gray of the eucalyptus trunks, and moved into the open, pausing to look up. Paquita drew back against the bush behind her, then lifted herself to her knees, watching until the figure disappeared beneath the ledge of the arbor. The warm color had flooded her face, and her big eyes widened and deepened, aflame with the emotion that parted her lips and shortened her breath. As the man's head and then his shoulders appeared above the bank below, she rose slowly until she stood erect, unclasping the cloak she wore and dropping it behind her as she rose. He gained the ledge on which the arbor stood and

stopped, looking about him, his keen eyes quick and eager in their search. He had pushed his hat back on his head, and his hair showed a dark line on his forehead. His cheeks and upper lip had a faint bluish tinge, an indication of the black of his carefully shaven beard. His face was somewhat square in outline, the effect of the salient chin, and the lines about the close-set mouth appeared somewhat hard and shrewd, the fold between his eyes indicative of concentration. He stood still, looking about him, and the girl observed him a moment in quivering silence; then stepping out of the shadow she came to the very edge of the steep bank above him.

"Dick," she scarcely more than whispered. He looked up with a quick lift of his head, and saw her. The sun had sunk to a mere rim on the horizon, and its glow pierced the black mass of cypress behind her, turning the red of her gown into a bit of flame. She stood poised a moment above him, outlined against the sombre background, a slender thing sheathed in fire, vivid, quivering, aloof, and the next moment he had opened his arms to her.

"Paquita," he said, in his deep voice, "oh, Quita!" He lifted her up in his arms and held her close, his lips on her hair, her eyes, her cheek, and she raised her arms then, clasping them about his neck, and turning her lips to meet his.

The sun was gone and the topmost leaves of the

eucalyptus in the hollow stirred in a breath of the evening breeze. A half moon hung in the sky above ready to mingle its pale light with the coming shadows of night, and the chill of twilight touched the two where they stood. The man raised his head at last, and looked down at her. "Quita," he said, breathlessly, "you little witch-girl! You dropped like a falling star from above there—let me look at you." He set her down, and taking her by the arms held her off, gazing at her. He was endeavoring by a resolute effort of will to conquer the emotion that shook him, but the blood was still hot in his cheeks, and his voice unsteady. The evening light softened her brilliant gown to a warm tint, and she smiled up at him shyly, her chin quivering. Her quickly drawn breath parted her lips and lifted the lace on her breast, and a sort of wonder grew in the man's eyes, a surprise not untinged with joy, but also touched with embarrassment.

"Why didn't you tell me you were grown so terribly old—and so grand?" he said. "I should have lifted my hat to you, and shaken hands first, and humbly asked if I might, for the sake of old times, kiss your cheek, instead of which I have behaved as if you were four years old—I shall have to begin at once to ask your pardon." He had talked on as a cover for his own uncertain feelings, but Paquita's face paled, and her eyes grew wide and troubled, yet

she only said in her slow way, "It seemed so lovely to see you again, I didn't think about anything else——"

"Nor I," he said, quickly. "Paquita, how long is it since I saw you in San Francisco?"

She hesitated, considering. "Three or four months, I guess," she replied.

"No, it is six," he corrected. "I was thinking as I came up. It seemed longer even than that."

"Is it?" she said, but she smiled a little now. "Won't you come into my 'parlor'?—Do you remember you used to call it that?" She had moved away from him, and gathered up her skirt as she walked ahead. He looked at her thoughtfully, his expression disquieted, but he helped her fasten back the vine. The little room was almost dark and she groped about on the table.

"What is it, Quita?" he asked.

"Matches," she said. "I want to light the lantern."

"Here, I have plenty," he answered. "Where is the light?"

"Just above your head." He bent and struck a match, and reaching up took down the lantern, and folding it up, lighted the candle it contained. He adjusted it and standing on tiptoe, hung it up again. It cast a subdued light on the white plumes of the pampas grass, and the red blankets, and Paquita's

warm tinted gown. His quick eye took in everything at a glance, and came back to her, lingering on her, but he only said, "How pretty you have made it."

"I brought the things down from my room," she replied, "I had to have some place, the house is worse than ever." She had seated herself on the couch, and he sat down beside her.

"You have changed it wonderfully," he said. "Do you remember the first time you brought me in here?"

She nodded, smiling. "Yes,—you were wandering around the grounds, wondering at the old house, and I saw you, and took you around, and Anita came pouncing down-stairs, and I sneaked you in here while she went around calling. That was away back when I was at The Sisters'—just a little girl. It was ages before you came again, though you promised me you would come right away." She had drawn herself up into a position that seemed more natural to her, one foot curled up under her, the other showing from beneath her skirt. She bent forward, her eyes on his. "I was in trouble—I cried about it, because I didn't know your name, and I was sure without that I could never find you again."

He laughed. "And the next time I did come, you saw me down in the trees, and you flew down like a bird. You held my hand tight when you reached me, and the first thing you said was, 'What is your

name?' and when I told you 'Richard Allison,' you kept saying it over—I couldn't think why—until you told me that if you knew my name you couldn't lose me again. I used to come pretty often after that, didn't I, Quita?" He was resting his arm on the rustic work behind him, and leaning over her.

She shook her head, not looking at him. "Not very," she said. "You used to come once in a while, on the nicest days, because you were out walking 'just to rest your brain,' you said," the dimples deepened in her cheeks, "and we had great times escaping Anita. Twice she caught us when her rheumatism wasn't bad, and you talked to her like a lawyer about the place. She thought you had a right to be there, I think. You didn't come for months, though, sometimes."

"We became good friends, though, didn't we, Quita? You always flew down the bank to meet me, and I would pick you up just as I did out there—and *how* you used to pour out your troubles to me! Inez had come then, and life wasn't sweet for you. You were a dear little thing, Quita, but a bit of a rascal too." He reached out to take her hand, then drew back. "I have laughed often about the last time I saw you—that time at St. Mary's—and the Sister sat so primly by while we talked. You looked as sleepy as a pussy-cat in the sun, and said good-by to me like a stranger. I didn't like it a little bit. I

went down into the hall and put on my coat ready to swear, and you opened the door into the little room behind me and peeped out, beckoning me in. How you got down there I don't know, I suppose you flew in and out of the window, but we didn't say good-by like strangers then, did we?" He had her hand now, and she left it passive in his. He spoke a little quickly, with an accent of determination. "I have never had anything in my life that has been—been sweeter than our friendship, Paquita. I am much older than you, and though you're not just a little girl any more—I realized that the last time I saw you—there is no reason why we should not continue to be the same friends we have always been, is there?"

There was a pause, and then Paquita looked up at him. "Why, no,—but what do you mean? Why shouldn't we be friends?" She asked it with her air of slight surprise, but the hand he did not hold caught a fold of her dress and crushed it.

"There is no reason," he said, flushing, "only I thought—that—well, that now you are Miss Payne, you might not care to spend your time on a tiresome old person who keeps forgetting that you are not a little girl any longer—who could not help forgetting it—sometimes—just as I did out there a few minutes ago." He endeavored to speak lightly, and Paquita's eyes left his and rested on the faint strip of moonlight without the door.

"Was that what you thought—out there—when I came down the bank?" she asked, quietly, and Allison was silenced. "No," she continued, slowly, "we're friends, of course, now, just the same as we always were. . . . You want to come up here just the same as you did when you had fussed all day in court, and wanted to rest your brain—just to play around a little,"—her voice held not the slightest hint of sarcasm, but he studied her doubtfully,—"and I am glad when you come, just the same as I always was. As long as I am here I hope you will come often." She turned to look up at him again.

He could not have asked for an answer more frank, and apparently unconscious of the caution his own words had expressed, nevertheless he looked unsatisfied. If Paquita saw it she showed no sign, but taking her hand from his she reached over and lifted the guitar from the table, bending her head and listening to the music below. Then she touched a chord or two, softly, in tune with the Spanish dance they were playing. "It's old Valdez, still," she said. "Do you remember how they used to play, and I would dance for you—just steps I made up in my head? I can dance a good deal better now."

He looked down at her, at the white nape of her neck with its two or three soft curls, and the curve of her cheek, and his brows lifted, the lines about his mouth relaxing. "What did you mean when you

said 'as long as you were here'?" he asked, in a lower tone.

"Just that I am going away again in a little while."

"I thought you were going to be here—indefinitely. You told me so in your note!" Allison exclaimed, sharply.

She lifted her head a little. "Why, yes, but Inez has decided, and Mr. Payne, that I better go on with my dancing. Inez has spent a good deal of money on my lessons, and she seems to be very hard up just now. I think Mr. Payne means to get me an engagement as soon as he can."

There was perfect silence, then Allison said a trifle indistinctly, "Where would you go?"

"East somewhere," she replied.

"Quita, you dancing on the stage—you wouldn't do it?" His voice held entreaty.

"I would. How can I live here? I can stand it a few weeks, until they get me a place with some company, but that's all. You don't know what it is like up in that house, and with Inez."

"No," he said in a low voice. "I never thought much about it—until lately. You seemed such a little thing, and just a part of the garden, and then they had the sense to send you away to a good school. Is it necessary, Quita?"

"What else is there for me to do? What else do

I know?" she exclaimed, with a touch of passion. "And, oh, Dick, I *can* dance——! They went wild over me this spring at 'The Academy'!" She half rose, and his arm went round her as if to keep her, but she slipped from his hold, and was out of the door. Allison followed her to the verge of the ledge where she stood impatiently tapping time to the music. It came in snatches and was too fast to suit her, but at the touch of Allison's hand on her arm she whirled away from him like a feather on the breeze. He had often watched her in delight when she was a child, but he stood now frowning heavily, the blood rising to his temples. It was a luminous night, clear and star-lit, and he could see her features; her face was pale in its black setting, her eyes wide and brilliant. She stood poised a moment beyond his reach, her head bent to catch the rhythm, her skirts held wide, her small feet and ankles visible, and then she barely moved to it, a floating improvisation of her own, that, at the quickening of the measure, changed into the perfect poetry of motion. She scarcely lifted her feet from the ground as she moved the length of the level space, but her body turned and swayed, bent and lifted, her skirts now caught about her, every graceful line of her body apparent, now spread wide like a cloud. Once, twice, she passed him, her eyes alight, the smile on her lips mocking, but the third time he

caught and lifted her, and as he clasped her he whispered as he had before, "Quita, oh, Quita!"

He carried her to the step of the arbor and held her in his arms, the moonlight on their faces, the rosy glow of the lantern behind them. "I will never let you do it," he said, passionately. "Why, Quita, I couldn't bear it. . . . Tell me, do you love me, little witch-girl?" She was silent.

"Tell me," he repeated. "I shall kiss you till you answer."

"You don't need to ask me," she said, "any more than I need to ask you the same thing."

"Why?" he demanded.

She reached up, drawing his head close to hers, her lips to his ear. "I knew it," she whispered, "the minute you kissed me—the first time this evening—and you knew it too. It frightened you, and you talked like that in there—I knew it all the time," she laughed, softly.

"Paquita, don't you know that I am twice as old as you are—what am I going to do with a baby like you?" The man that hesitated and considered was rousing again.

"Just love me," she said, softly, "that's all, and I will be as old as you like."

"I would find difficulty in not loving you,—that is the trouble,—but it is not right to you, you are only a child and know nothing more of what is best for you

than a child would. You are fifteen and I am thirty-two—I ought not to have taken you in my arms, or kissed you as I have to-night, but God knows it seemed natural enough."

She raised herself a little, holding him closer. "Oh, why do you talk in that way!" she said, passionately. "Dick, do you think I don't know! If I had family, and friends, and position, and *money,* if a lot of things were not as they are, you would love me more—yes, you would; but as it is, you love me better than anybody else—you do—*you know it.* . . . And I—why, Dick, away back when I was a little, *little* girl, I didn't love anybody in the world but you. When I'd lie awake at night because the wind screamed so through the house up there, and it creaked and cracked, and the rats ran around so that people seemed to be creeping about, I would just cover up my head and think of you—just you. And in the day and at night, I would come and sit on this step, right here, where we are, and look over there to the city and wonder what you were doing. Then up at St. Mary's I tried to learn everything they'd teach me so I would—so I might—appear better, and you would love me more. . . . I would have done anything, *anything,* to give myself a different position—so I could be among the kind of people you know. . . . If it hadn't been for you—that I just *knew* you loved me—I—I——" She gasped.

"Paquita, don't, *don't!*" he cried, wincing. "Do you want to make me sorry for all the times I have kissed you? My Lord, no man is good enough to be loved like that—I am not. . . . Don't cry, darling, don't!" He held her close, softly kissing her hair. "I called you a little rascal in there, will you forgive me?"

"But I am—sometimes," she said, in smothered tones.

"Well, I won't argue the question," he said, laughing a little uncertainly. Then his manner changed. "But, Paquita, you are not to go on the stage. I won't have it—not if you love me—anything but that!" He spoke, sternly.

"I don't want to," she whispered.

"And, Quita, when I have thought things out, I am going to see Inez Overa, and this Mr. Payne who seems to be your guardian. If you are related to the Paynes who used to live here, you come of a good family. You ought to know more about your parents, and they seem to have told you almost nothing. If there is a chance to better things for you I want to do it." Paquita was silent.

"You won't see them right away, will you?" she asked, finally.

"Would you rather I didn't?" he said, struck by her tone.

She nestled her head against his breast with a

little sigh, "It's nice just this way—for a while—isn't it?" she asked, softly.

He laughed again, and drew her closer, flushing deeply as he looked down at her. "I have no objections, Baby—but—it will have to be done some time—I suppose?" She made no reply, and they were silent. The snatches of music had stopped and it was very quiet. The lights were going out, one by one, in the arroyo, and all down the further gorge they twinkled at rarer intervals. A mocking-bird twittered in the eucalyptus grove below, and then sang several liquid notes that rang clear in the quiet night, paused, twittered and trilled, bursting at last into a continued melody.

"Just listen, Dick," Paquita whispered. "They always sang like that down there." She stirred to move out of his embrace, but he held her tightly.

"No, stay here," he said, in a low tone. "Please—I will have to go away soon enough. . . . Quita, the world's one thing sitting here in the moonlight with you in my arms, and quite another when I sit looking out of my office window. I get a fever in my blood when I see things doing, and I want to be in the fore-front every time."

"And you are," she said, proudly. "Oh, I know! I've seen the things they say about you. They say that you are the best lawyer in the city, that you can do more with a jury than any one else in the State."

"It has been slow going, though, Quita," he muttered. "If I hadn't been helped, I wouldn't be anywhere."

"Who helped you, Dick?" she asked, timidly; but he either did not hear her, or he chose not to answer. He was silent so long that she said softly, "I am going in now."

"You don't have to go," he objected, his manner eager again. "Stay a little longer."

"Yes, I must, Dick."

"A little longer, Quita; come inside a minute where I can see you better." He rose and drew her in beneath the subdued light of the lantern. He took her face in his hands, lifting it a little, and her eyes grew wide with joy at the look he gave her. "You would be worth a good deal," he said, in a low voice, and she was too happy to ask him what he meant. He let her go then. "Is it good-night, then, Quita?" he asked. "Do I have to put the light out now?"

"Yes, of course," she replied, smiling. Allison reached up and taking the lantern down, blew out the candle. They went out, and he unfastened the vine, dropping it back over the opening. Then he climbed up the steep bank with her, but at the top she stopped him. "I am going on by myself," she said. "You must say good-night here."

"But how are you going to get in?" he asked her.

"By a window, or through a hole in the ceiling, or how?"

"By the front door."

"Let me go there with you then."

"No, the dog will hear you," Paquita objected.

"Then I have to say good-night now—here?"

"Yes." She stood back from the arm he put about her, and he reached and drew her up to him, kissing her again and again, refusing to let her go.

"How many months will it be before you come again?" she whispered.

"I suppose you mean hours? How many do you say, Quita?"

She bent her head back, laughing gently, as she touched each of his eyes, his cheeks, and his lips with her slender finger. "Five and five are ten, five's fifteen, five's twenty, and four's twenty-four," she counted.

"Exactly," Allison said. "You have learned the arithmetic of love, Baby. I—Quita, Quita, what will be the end of it all?—There, you may go now."

Allison had turned on the light in his office, and stood looking about him, before taking off his hat and laying it down. His mind was so filled with another scene, and other impressions, that the large well-furnished room, with its spacious desk and wide windows, that should be so familiar, looked to him unreal. His

room was one of a suite, and the lettering on the glass door of the general reception office, through which he had just passed, set forth the names of his firm:

ALLISON, BECK, AND BURNS,
ATTORNEYS AT LAW.

The firm occupied six rooms, the entire corner of the fifth floor in the high building that was the nucleus of the law offices of the city, and the very atmosphere bespoke the standing of the firm. Allison's own suite opened upon the library, a room lined with books, probably the best law library in the city.

To Allison all this had meant twelve years of patient toil, of careful living, of wise expenditure of the means that came into his hand, the shrewd handling of opportunity, and not least of all, the sympathetic assistance of a woman. He had allowed himself but little of the sort of relaxation, the pandering to the mere emotional in him, that he had seen plenty of in other men; not that he lacked in the qualities, but because a yielding meant to him a forgetfulness of ambition, and a waste of money. He was climbing fast toward the top rungs of the ladder of professional ambition, but in that city of rapidly growing fortunes, he as yet had his to make.

There had been opportunities for him to turn over in real estate the modest sums that came into his hands, but true to the ideals of his boyhood, he had

determinedly used them for the establishment of his professional position. During the last two or three years, he had had an opportunity to handle somewhat larger sums, and the investment of them had been a particular pleasure, a joy he had always craved. It had opened to him a future of possibilities that was alluring.

But as he laid off his hat and seated himself in his comfortable chair, he was not thinking of his ambitions, save as a background that insisted on being visible. He absently lifted some papers on his desk, but they failed to arouse his attention, and leaning back, his hands clasped behind his head, he gazed out of the window at the expanse of moon-lit sky. He was considering the scene of the evening, his thoughts introspective, his expression disquieted. He saw the neglected grounds, and the rambling house, each successive year a little more desolate in its decay, and the vivid child that danced through the sunshine and shadow, over ruin and decay, into his arms. His cheek was still warm from the pressure of her lips, but it was not the vision of the woman that grew clearer as he reviewed the past; it was the appealing tenderness of the child. She had been a casual amusement to him in the beginning, that as time went on had grown into a delight. There had come to be a bond between them, she expecting his interest and

attention, and he reliant upon her affection and capacity to please him.

It was characteristic of his self-absorption that it had not occurred to him to attempt any amelioration of her lonely and unusual position; her people and her surroundings appeared to be undesirable, and he had purposely avoided a more intimate acquaintance with them. It was a principle of his to give little attention to the affairs of others save as they came to him in a business way. But Paquita, herself, pleased him. She had touched the lighter vein in him, the desire to be amused. Later on it became a craving to yield to her alluring charm, an unconscious realization of the mingling of child and woman in her. He had always treated her affectionately, and with a tacit acknowledgment of a sort of claim upon him. During the last two years he had seen her only at long intervals, as his business interests happened to take him to the northern city, but he had come away from each sight of her, disquieted, a sensation that soon lost itself in the more active interests of his life. He had not realized the eagerness with which he had been filled when he had smiled over her note, carefully written in the usual large convent hand, a half dozen lines to the page. So she was back in the ruined garden again, and he had wondered with a flush if she would fly into his arms, or how she would receive him. He had felt an undercurrent of

satisfaction at the thought that there would be no chaperoning eyes to check the natural expression of her affection if she saw fit to show it to him, and he would not grant to himself that in the state of his own feelings it would be far better for him should he be received with all the conventional surroundings. He was by nature a respecter and upholder of the conventional, more so than most men; yet one of Paquita's particular charms to him had always been her freedom from the usual and conventional. It was one of those inconsistencies in character that are as natural as they are surprising. Their friendship was all their own, a something hidden and sweet, unsuspected even by the occupants of the old house.

Allison had long been in a state of depressed irritation over what had been one of the most persistent and determined ambitions of his life, for he had his ambitions in love as in other matters, and as he held Paquita's note in his hand, he had asked himself how many more of his best years he was going to give up to an apparently hopeless pursuit. Why not take the joys that life offered him? He was growing old without tasting its pleasures. In this frame of mind he had gone, and he had come away with pulses throbbing, and a disquieting view of his future. Little Paquita in her warm red gown, and her decorated bower! Was it necessary that love should be an ambition as well? But as he sat considering the

future, the fold between his eyes deepened, and his mouth hardened.

He brought his chair down, sitting upright with an impatient lift of his shoulders. "Good heavens!" he muttered. "Can I never learn just to enjoy the present?" He stirred the papers on his desk impatiently, and uncovered a pile of letters, the last mail of the afternoon that he had failed to open. The topmost letter bore a handwriting he knew well, and he opened it quickly, his look eager.

"Dear Richard," he read, "I am writing hastily to you after having seen Mr. Attell. I came down from Moneta this morning in order to have a talk with him, and shall return almost immediately. Mr. Attell has promised me to see you to-morrow, and I am delighted, for this will give you the chance you have wanted so long. It will mean an opportunity to invest in Conchita oil land, and also an offer to take charge of the Attell legal interests. I am very glad for your sake.

"I know how unreasonable I appear to you—I have never realized it more fully than I have during these last few days—and I know that you are both angry and hurt at my attitude. I am very sorry, but all I can do is to beg you not to let *anything* interfere with the friendship side of our long acquaintance. That means a great deal to me, for your welfare is one of the warmest interests I have. I can assist you a

little sometimes, and I hope you will not deprive me of that happiness. I might say more were you here, but I intended this to be a business letter, and I am, as always,

"Your affectionate friend,

"KATE TALWORTH.

"I forgot to say that if as a result of your conference with Mr. Attell, you see a good opportunity for investment, please call upon me. I think even the Attells feel the hard times and it might be an exceedingly good chance for making an investment that would not occur were money more plentiful."

Richard Allison held the note in his hand for some time, studying it thoughtfully, his eyes bright, his face flushed. "That is like her!" he exclaimed. "There is nothing finer in creation than Kate—fine and true always. Oh, if she would listen to me after all!" Then he flung it down with an ejaculation of self-contempt,—"and after to-night, too!" he added, his lips compressed.

VII.

HISTORY AND A REASON

"I RODE over on the chance that you had returned," Horton said, as he crossed the room to greet Kate. "You said two days, but I thought it possible that you had returned earlier." He endeavored to speak easily, an effort on his part to hide anxiety as well as the extreme pleasure he felt. He had come to inquire about Kate's probable return for the simple reason that he had been unable to keep away. To his surprise and joy he was told that Kate was there, and that she would see him.

"I came on the early morning train," Kate replied. "I thought you would come this afternoon—I hoped you would." She had risen and given him her hand, her smile sweet, her manner frank and friendly.

Horton flushed with pleasure, and the strained look left his face. "Thank you, Kate," he said, simply. For twenty-four hours he had been schooling himself to meet any attitude Kate might take toward him, and with a word and a look she had put him at his ease. He had pondered endlessly over their conversation of two nights before, and ended by thrusting the whole thing aside. He could not explain the meaning of her words, any more than he could explain Kate

herself. Years ago he had decided that so far as his attitude to Kate was concerned, the strange and unexplained did not exist, and now his determination was the same. His trust in her, in the reality of her that his instinct revealed to him, was absolute. He wanted her head on his breast, her cheek against his; given that assurance, what else mattered? Why agonize over futilities? He bitterly regretted that, pricked by jealousy, he had allowed a reproach to escape him. He had come in a few short hours to hate the very sound of Richard Allison's name. He had walked the floor of his room the night before repeating to himself, "Have patience, keep a tight rein on yourself." Kate had unknowingly set him a task that roused every energy he possessed. Just as the scornful glance she had given him years ago had ranked him with the fat bully he had so eagerly thrashed, so now her reluctance made him a part of some hateful recollection, endowed him with characteristics that did not belong to him. Back at that time she had discovered her mistake and told him so; she would do it in this case also. Horton's jaw had set and his head lifted as he continued his rapid walk back and forth. He wanted her love—what else was there that had mattered particularly, since he had first looked into her eyes? But what chance was there for love when trust was wanting.

Horton would not grant to himself that there might

be another reason for Kate's attitude to him, a reason that she would be slow to confess. Her positive statement that she would "marry nobody" did not necessarily mean that her heart was free. The blood had risen hot to Horton's face when he reached this point in his reflections, and he swore passionately to himself. If that were the case his efforts would be fruitless indeed. He would not grant its possibility. He went back to his first position: he would walk carefully and win his way.

It was in that mood that he came, and Kate's unfailing tact ignored what had been painful in their last meeting, placing him at his ease. She was seated on the green-cushioned window-seat, and Horton took a chair near her. He felt a sudden sense of peace that was infinitely grateful after the feverish unrest of the last two days. He was with her again and she had smiled on him.

Kate prepared the tea and Hop waited deftly upon them. The long low-ceilinged room, restful in its soft colors of bronze-greens and brown, was shaded and cool, after the glare of the mid-afternoon sun. Kate sat with her back to the window and as she bent over the table the light behind her turned her hair to the color of burnished copper. When she turned so that the shadow rested upon it, it looked very dark, a marked contrast to her fair skin. Horton watched her in delight, the quick lift of her head when she looked

at him, the curve of her dark lashes when her eyes were lowered, the slight lift of the upper lip, and the warm red of the full under lip. She smiled frequently when she talked, a faint smile that rarely touched the gravity of her sombre eyes. The man who brought a smile to Kate's eyes as well as her lips felt a certain triumph, and a spur to further effort. It was one of the charms she unconsciously exerted. She was not so slender as the girl Horton remembered, but every line was still graceful, the erect carriage of her head even more marked than it used to be. The whole woman had ripened, grown richer in line and coloring, and still had lost nothing of a certain girlish charm. Her cheek and chin were as soft in their curve as a child's.

Horton was too much absorbed for a time to notice that Kate was talking more rapidly than usual, her manner almost vivacious. He was first struck by her color, which was so deep at times as to be vivid, then again fading until she was pale. He noticed then that when she looked fully at him her eyes appeared unusually dark, the pupils dilated. There was a touch of something hurried, or a little breathless in her manner that was foreign to Horton's conception of her. She carefully avoided the personal as did Horton, but they met on common ground in their love of the beauty about them. "The lights on the mountains, and the changing colors of the water—" Kate

said, "there is so much that is beautiful crowded upon the senses at once that it is a little like pain. I feel a tightness in my throat sometimes, as if I should like to cry."

Horton gave her a quick look of understanding. "I know," he said.

Kate spoke then of the Moneta Mountains and the trails she found the most interesting. "I spend so much time here on horseback," she said, "and I never ride in Los Angeles; level streets have so little attraction; they seem to be intended for automobiles."

"Parts of Los Angeles are broken enough," Horton replied. "The whole northwestern section is hilly. I used to ride all over the hills when I was a boy."

Kate paused for a moment before she spoke. "I had rather a curious experience yesterday. I think I chanced on your old home; was your home on Summit Hill, a big place with terraced grounds?"

"Yes!" Horton exclaimed in surprise. "You mean the old Payne house? . . . It's a ruin now, Kate. How in the world did you happen to go there!"

Kate motioned to Hop to remove the tea-tray before she answered him. "I had the afternoon free yesterday, and as I was walking on Broadway I saw a Summit Hill car, and took it out to the heights. I think it was Aunt Silence's having spoken of Summit

Hill and my knowing nothing of that part of the city that made me go. There is a wonderful view of the city from the first hill, and I left the car to walk about and see better. I walked back over the hills, and it was a row of big cypress trees that first attracted my attention. I crossed the arroyo, and then I saw the house." Kate had turned more fully toward Horton, and, drawing closer to her a stand that stood at her side, she leaned her elbow on it, her chin in her hand, her eyes wide and dark, fixed on his face. "I went into the grounds so as to see the house better."

Horton was too much surprised at what she had told him to notice the deep interest of her expression. "You went into the grounds—and up to the house!" Horton said. "How strange! I was born in that house, Kate, and lived there—that is most of the time—until I was ten years old, and I have been inside of it only once since. I don't take much interest in some of my property, do I?" He spoke with an undercurrent of deep feeling.

"But you—do you mean that you own it—now?"

"Yes—unfortunately," said Horton. "I own about fifty acres of the old Payne tract, and the house and grounds are a part of it."

"And you could let it go to ruin like that!" her voice was expressive.

Horton paused in surprise before answering. She

had introduced a subject so apart from his daily interests, and foreign to his thoughts at that moment, that he stopped to consider. "I was not able to take care of the place when it needed care," he explained, "and of late years it has gone beyond the possibility of repairs—but why have you asked me about it? Do you know its history?"

"Only what some one on the place told me—that it belonged to a family of Paynes."

"Yes, there is an old woman, I believe, who has the only livable corner of the house," Horton said. "I thought possibly Mrs. Silence had told you something of it. No one but an old resident would be likely to know. Did you connect me with it, Kate? Did you think of me when you were there?" He spoke with some eagerness.

"Yes——" she admitted, hesitating, and plainly embarrassed by his question.

"I am glad then that the place exists," he said, with emphasis. "I never was before."

"I suppose," said Kate, ignoring his last remark, "it would have cost a great deal to keep up grounds like that—I know what it means here, but it seemed like a sin almost——" she stopped.

Horton moved restlessly. "I hate the sight and thought of that house!" he exclaimed, hotly. "That is the real reason I have left it alone. The sooner it goes to pieces the better." Then he added more

quietly, "but you don't know my reasons, so you wouldn't understand."

"Oh," she said, distressed, "I did not mean to criticize, or to ask——"

"What happened there is no secret," Horton answered, quickly, "only it involves a good deal of family history—and my boyhood. I rarely say anything about it, but to you, Kate, I should not mind—I should be glad if you were interested. . . . It was one of the things I thought of last night—what utter strangers we were to each other—in reality. It is part of my presumption, asking for your interest when you know so little of me, or my family."

"I should like to hear anything you can tell me about that desolate house," Kate said, with a degree of feeling that astonished Horton. "It impressed me—that place. I have thought of it constantly." She had ignored the personal in what he had said, and as if conscious of it, or urged by some other feeling, she added almost timidly, "It was not the house alone that interested me; the name connected it with you at once, and I wondered, and wanted very much to know more of your family. I felt sure that you would come to-day, and I intended to ask you."

Horton was struck anew by his utter inability to understand her, but he felt both surprise and pleasure. Her confession implied interest; he had not been forgotten; the very fact that she had searched for

his home, showed that he was in her thoughts. His cheeks grew warm, and his voice eager. "There is nothing about my family or myself I shall not be glad to tell you, Kate, if you have the patience and desire to listen. It would be joy enough to me to feel that you cared——" He stopped, abruptly, fearful of his own impetuosity.

She flushed painfully, but her answer was given with composure, and she met his look steadily. "I should like to hear about the house, and about the Paynes—is yours a California family? I remember you told me you were born here."

"No," Horton said, "we are from Carolina, originally, but aside from my father and his cousin James Payne I know very little of the family. I only know that my father was proud of his name, and that the family was Southern in its sympathies, and well-to-do before the war. I have never even met the Paynes who have an interest in the remainder of that Los Angeles tract. They are distant relatives. I know that both my father and his cousin James had Northern investments, and after the war they left Charleston and went to New York, where my father, who was steady and conservative, went into business, and James, who was brilliant, but reckless, to gambling in stocks. They both made money, and my father married first. He married a Miss Gregory of New York, and almost immediately afterwards James

married a Miss Selwyn of Baltimore." Horton paused for a moment for Kate had changed her position, drawing further back into the window, her face half averted, her eyes lowered. He had talked so far without thinking much of what he was saying, for he had been trying to read her expression. He frowned now as he went on. "There was a tangle in my mother's love affairs that made trouble for me later on. She had been engaged to James Payne two years when she suddenly broke the engagement and married my father. He and his cousin had never been congenial, and their entirely different business interests and ways of life had divided them still more. My father was a quiet man, determined and positive in his likes and dislikes, and I think his aversion to James began when they were boys. To make matters worse between them they both loved my mother. James was a handsomer man than my father, and fascinating, particularly to women. I have never known how much or how little he loved my mother, for there were many other women in his life, and he told the truth to very few of them, but of this I am certain, he was the one love of my mother's life. Perhaps her fortune tempted him, but I don't pretend to judge him. He figured in an affair in New York that was too glaring in its unfaithfulness for my mother's pride to endure, and she broke her engagement and married my father. From that day my father and

James Payne never spoke, and shortly afterwards James, as I said, married Miss Selwyn. His wife did not live long and left him with a little boy, another James Payne.

"My father had invested in that land near Los Angeles, and as my mother was fond of California, he built that old house, and terraced the hill to give her pleasure. I have a packet of yellow letters, my father's letters to his wife, and I think I might write like that to the woman I loved. I learned a great deal from those letters. I learned that my mother was a very unhappy woman, and more than glad to spend her time out here, with my father in New York most of the time. She had all that money could give her, but I remember her face away back when I first remembered things, and I don't think it made matters any smoother for her, or that she took any particular joy in me.

"James Payne was running his course pretty rapidly in New York and one day he went to smash; it was the end that might have been expected for him. He had plenty of assurance, but not enough nerve for his vocation. Then he came out here, and I first saw him in that garden that was my playground. My father soon followed, but I think there was no need for his coming. My mother was unhappy, but she was not a woman who would forget herself. I have another bundle of letters, my mother's letters to

James Payne and his to her, and they cover a period of several years. Whatever his attitude to her, hers to him was honest and womanly. I think, however, that my father was wretched, and that his jealousy finally got the better of him and angered her terribly. A child may have no understanding, but it can feel, and I was witness to more than one quarrel. There seemed to be no place for me in the general discomfort.

"Then the thing happened that closed the house and left the garden to go to ruin. My bedroom was at the end of the upper hall, and I was waked one night by a loud report. It was not more than nine o'clock, and the servants were still up and downstairs. It was raining hard, and blowing, and I was the only one, apparently, that heard. I was terrified, but I crept out into the hall. When I opened my eyes there was a light there, but when I reached it, it was gone. The hall was dark, except for the dim light from the big window at the end, and I ran for the stairs, but did not scream, for there was some one moving in the hall beside myself. I don't know just how I knew it, but as I ran I saw it, for just one minute. It stood tall between me and the light from the window, the form of a man, that bent and ducked back into the shadow. My bare foot stepped on something soft and warm, and then I screamed, and stumbled, and fell. I was wild with fright, and I shrieked, and shrieked, and the servants rushed up

and lifted me from something that lay still; I can close my eyes now and see it all, the flaring light that they carried, their circle of terrified faces, and the form on the floor. Then some one bent and lifted his head and I saw that it was my father. There was a dark spot on his forehead, and the light showed the pistol that lay by his hand.

"They carried me away, shivering and crying, and sent for my mother who had gone to some party in the town. She came, it seemed to me a long time afterwards, and held me in her arms, and I told her about it, and then others questioned me, and every inch of the house was searched, but they found nothing at all, not even an open window. The pistol beside my father was his own, and there were those who had heard him say that he did not care to live. James Payne was sent for, and he came from San Francisco. Kate, I may have been dreaming, I may have seen a shadow, it may have been a dozen things that were suggested, but so far as I am concerned—to my dying day—I shall *know* that some one stole along the wall before me in that hall, and stood for a moment between me and the window." Horton stopped, breathing quickly, and Kate said nothing.

"There were bitter things said about my mother," Horton continued, "for there was a general impression of family inharmony. In time she came to know what was said, and she had to bear the blame

for my father's suicide, as well as the troubles she brought upon herself by her second marriage. She held out against James for two years, but her love was too much for her, and she married him." Horton's voice shook. "He broke her heart little by little, while he paid for his pleasures with her fortune. My father's money he could not touch—except as my mother had the income—that was left to me. As a boy I knew how he lived, and so did his own son. He would not quarrel with me, he was always suave and even kindly, but he did as he pleased, regardless of any of us. He demanded money of my mother, smilingly, or he caressed her with one hand while he stole with the other——" Kate drew a quivering sigh, and Horton stopped abruptly. "Forgive me, Kate," he said, "I shall say not another word. Why should I tell you such things—they are sickening. Only when I think of that man,"—his voice rose,—"and his son,—for he was another just like him, only a generation worse,—I am beside myself with rage. I had no home because of those two, I was sent around to different schools, usually with James, who was just about as bad a companion as a boy could have, until I learned to despise him too much for him to influence me. It was the helpless sense of shame and loathing of those two, and the feeling of pity for my mother, and anger at her attitude to me, that ruined my boyhood, and hurried me into follies. My mother died

when I was twenty, Kate, an unhappy, broken woman, and I hated my early associations so thoroughly that I dropped them as soon as I could. I had been left with ample means, and I had a boy's desire for experience, and a wish to see the world. I wandered about for three years, and naturally I did foolish things; three spendthrift years were enough to leave me seriously hampered. When I first met you, Kate, I had just taken stock, and reached a conclusion or two. I had decided to have done with folly, and go to work. There was some of my father's business sense coming to the surface. I liked this country out here—my father had left me all of that orange land that needed to be developed and cared for, and I decided to make a home here. That was it, Kate, really, the motive under every other; I wanted a home and a little home tenderness. As a child I had craved it, and when I was twenty I wanted it even more. I looked into your eyes and what I saw there answered to my desire—I don't know any other way to express it, and, Kate,—but what am I talking about——" His voice dropped suddenly, and lifting his shoulders impatiently, he got to his feet, an uncontrollable impulse with him when struggling with difficulties. "I am such an absolute fool," he said through his teeth. "I swore to keep hold on myself—I began to tell you why I never wanted to see that house again, and I have washed the Payne family's

soiled linen in your presence—and gone on to talk about myself! I seem to be fated to do the wrong thing and displease you—whatever I do——" He stopped, helplessly, scarlet with anger at himself.

"You have not displeased me," Kate said, quickly. "It was I who asked you to tell—to tell me what you have. I understand you—and many other things—much better now. I know what your boyhood must have been—I understand it better than you think." Her eyes were brilliant, her voice uncertain. She paused for a moment, then spoke more deliberately. "Please sit down. I have been interested in everything you have said, and I wanted to ask you about something else. . . . When I was at the Summit Hill house the person who took me around the grounds was a young girl, and I have been thinking about her more than about the place. She was very pretty, quite unusual looking, and she told me her name was Payne—Paquita Payne. She seemed so out of place there—she interested me very much."

"Paquita Payne!" Horton said. He looked at Kate in puzzled surprise. "I don't know any Payne by that name."

"She spoke of the people who had charge of her as being Spanish, she called the woman Inez, but said she was not related to her."

"Spanish—" Horton repeated. His face darkened.

"I said then that I supposed she had an interest in the property, and she said, 'Oh, no,' that she and Inez just stayed with Anita, the old woman who has charge of the place." Kate spoke less clearly and deliberately, but Horton was intent on what she was saying.

The color that the agitation of the few moments before had brought to his face was fading. He was silent, his air thoughtful; then he said quietly, "I suppose it is some member of the family I don't know; there might be an army of them encamped there, and I not know it—I will ask my agent about it." His manner was a dismissal of the subject, but he frowned heavily as he looked down on the floor, his brows drawn down into almost a straight line, his jaw setting. Kate observed him, her own look troubled.

"You mentioned the Selwyns of Baltimore a short time ago—do you know the Selwyns at all?" Kate asked.

"The Selwyns?" Horton's look came back to her. "You mean my brother James's mother's family? No, only by name—James was my brother as well as my cousin, you see," his lip lifted. "Why, do you know them, Kate?"

"I knew of them—a good many years ago. You just spoke of your brother,—is he living?"

"Oh, yes, he is living," said Horton, shortly.

"I couldn't help wondering what had become of him."

"I do not pretend to keep track of Mr. James Selwyn Payne," Horton said, icily. "I thank God I am not his keeper!" He lifted his shoulders with an angry gesture; then his voice dropped to a note of tenderness, "Forgive me, Kate, I never even say that man's name to myself if I can help it."

"From what you have told me I can understand why you feel so. It is all very interesting—what you have told me—and I thank you very much. I did not want to seem curious, but I was impressed by my afternoon at your old home—I have been haunted by it." Kate's hands were clasped before her on the table and she bent forward a little, her eyes on Horton, but he had a curious feeling that she was looking beyond him at some vision of her own, and that her thoughts were engrossed by it. He felt that he had little place in what was passing in her mind, and he was touched by a sense of chill, a feeling of isolation. It lasted only a moment, for Kate took her hands from the table and sat straight. "Would you like to see my garden?" she asked. "The sun is low now and it will be cool."

Horton acquiesced gladly, and the following half hour brought him a certain degree of happiness, for Kate's manner to him was that of the earlier afternoon. When he took his leave he asked her for the rose she

had been carrying, and she gave it to him without hesitation. "I have broken the stem," she said, "I think you would better take another."

"No, I want this one," he said, with emphasis, and as he took it from her hand all the suppressed feeling of the afternoon sprang into the look he gave her. She met it gravely, even sadly, her vivacity with its touch of excitement quieted for the moment. It was not until Horton was ready to mount his horse that Kate said, "I expect to go to Los Angeles again tomorrow, but I hope you will come to see Aunt Silence —I know she will ask you to come."

Horton turned to her in surprise and disappointment. "But you have just returned, Kate!"

"I shall have to go again—I hope only for a day or two," Kate said.

"Not longer, Kate?"

"I hope not—but I shall write to Aunt Silence if I am kept a day or two longer——" and Horton felt that there was nothing more he could say.

VIII.

A MONOLOGUE

KATE had said that she would be gone only a few days, but her absence lengthened out into a week, and during that time Horton haunted the house beside the ocean. The next day after Kate's departure he had received a note from Mrs. Silence, bidding him to afternoon tea with her. "Of course," said that lady, in her very characteristic communication, "we have never met, but Kate has given me an introduction by proxy, which is quite sufficient, considering that it was Kate who gave it. I am not playing bridge for a time, for I am depressed by the death of a favorite kid, a beautiful creature, and I intend to spend my afternoons at home for a time. If you care to drop in and take tea with an old woman who is not in the best of spirits, I shall be very pleased indeed."

"Now," said Horton, as he returned the missive to its envelope, "if I were not acquainted with the sad end of Abdulla, that reference would be a little ambiguous." He would most gladly have faced twenty old ladies for the mere satisfaction of sitting in Kate's garden and hearing her name spoken, and he prepared for his call with a good deal of eagerness.

It was the first of a succession of such visits. More than once it was not just the latter part of the afternoon that Horton spent listening to Mrs. Silence's fluent conversation, but when the shadows threatened night he would be cordially urged to stay to dinner and spend the evening. He did not decline; he was far happier there than in any other spot. Mrs. Silence made no concealment of her liking for him, and Horton thoroughly enjoyed her society. It had its foundation in respect and liking on his part. He discovered why it was that she was a universal favorite, and the reason of Kate's evident affection for her.

Mrs. Clarissa Silence was an oddity, but she was a thoroughly worldly-wise oddity, and a capable match for any one of the sharp tongues about her. She was humorous, quick, rarely anything but genial in her sarcasm, and impersonal in her attitude toward matters that did not concern her. She was shrewd in her estimate of character, and an unusual combination of tact and frankness, tempered by an indestructible fund of cheer. She gave Horton a half hour's scrutiny, and took him into her small inner circle. He was introduced to the mysteries of the stable-yard, as well as the sweet-scented intricacies of Kate's garden, and each room of the charming low-ceilinged house. He was even taken within the threshold of Kate's white and blue, and gold bedchamber. "It is like her, isn't it?" Aunt Silence had said, looking a

long way up to the tall man whose blue eyes darkened as they slowly travelled about the room, and Horton had said, "Yes," in a low voice, much as if he were standing in a sanctuary.

He would find the most sheltered place for Mrs. Silence's chair and the most comfortable stool for her feet, for Aunt Silence seated, found some difficulty in reaching the ground, even with the tips of her toes. The place abounded in stools and foot-rests. At forty she had been short and plump, and at fifty-five she appeared still shorter and more plump. Her cheeks were still rosy, her wide mouth had its irresistible inclination to lift at one corner, and her eyes were in contrast, an unwinking china blue. Her abundant gray hair was always dressed very high, a brave endeavor to secure another longed-for inch of stature.

Horton would bend his long body, kneeling to adjust the foot-rest, until Aunt Silence declared herself very comfortable. Then he would be sent to the kitchen with some message concerning tea, or into some remote corner of the living-room for a bag of crochet yarn, for Mrs. Silence crocheted quite as well as she played bridge. As she busily worked, and Horton sat stretched in a most comfortable garden chair, the conversation, or rather Aunt Silence's monologue, would be something like this.

"Yes, when Kate comes back, I shall go down to Los Angeles, that is really my home, and I have a

house there. I think I shall stay ten days. There is an old acquaintance of mine, a Mrs. White and her husband, he was a professor of languages in the east, who have come to Los Angeles to live. They don't know the place at all, and of course it won't suit them, the people won't. I must go down and see what I can do for them. I think perhaps I better stay several days with them, and get them into the right church; it's the only thing for them, I am afraid." Aunt Silence was thoughtful. "You see," she continued, "Mrs. White is rather—well—obtuse, of course very nice, but obtuse and quite well pleased with herself. Her husband's been a dean or something in a college, so she considers their position unassailable. I went to school with Amanda White when I was a girl, and she never had any more sense of humor than she has now. I visited them once in Boston, and it was quite an experience. Mrs. White gave a luncheon for me—all professors' wives—and she was deploring the fact that she had no children. 'It is so much easier to keep house if there are children,' said Amanda. 'They always eat up the scraps so. Mr. White and I never can dispose of even a small roast.'

" 'Well, why don't you keep pigs?' said one of the women, promptly, and Amanda never smiled. 'Why, they wouldn't let us keep them in the city, would they?' she asked gravely." Horton chuckled, his

pleasant eyes twinkling. Aunt Silence's mouth twitched slightly. "I am afraid they may not enjoy it out here," she remarked.

"I hope you will not go away," Horton said. "Let the Whites struggle along by themselves for a time—it will do them good."

Aunt Silence shook her head, "I have to go really. It is time I gave my house an airing, only Hop will be grieved. He thinks this place could not thrive without him, and he will be in a nervous chill if he thinks a Japanese is cleaning my windows in Los Angeles and he not there to make life unbearable for him."

"Hop seems to be devoted to you," Horton remarked, smiling in remembrance of the conversation he had overheard a few nights before.

"Yes, he is," said Mrs. Silence, with some pride. "He has kept house for me for twenty years. As regularly as his New Year comes he says, 'I go back China in one month,' and I say, 'Very good, Hop, then I get married right away. I must have a man in the house,' and he grunts, and that is the last I hear of it. The first time or two I was thrown into a panic by it, and then it occurred to me that it was a joke, a Chinese joke. I have grown terribly dependent on Hop. I have been ill only once in my life, that was years ago, and I was sure I was going to have appendicitis—that was when it was the right

thing to die of it. It came on suddenly, and I called for Hop. 'Hop,' I said, 'I am heap sick, get the doctor.' He ran for him, and he turned green while I groaned. You see when it occurred to me that it was appendicitis, the pain was twice as bad. 'I have appendicitis,' I said. 'I will die right away.' It is the only time I have seen tears in Hop's eyes. 'You damn liar,' he said, choking, and I never felt more comforted in my life, for I did so hope that I was. Whenever I am in great trouble Hop swears, and you have no idea what a help it is. It's more comforting than doing it yourself, and you don't feel so responsible."

"I wonder if it would be," said Horton. "I never thought of it from that standpoint; I never had any one to do it for me. . . . But did you have appendicitis, Mrs. Silence?"

"No," said Aunt Silence in disgust. "The doctor made me so angry I never had *him* again. He told me not to eat Welsh rabbit again, and acted in such a bored way—if I didn't actually have appendicitis, I know I had the beginnings of it."

"Does Hop comfort Miss Talworth in the same way?" Horton asked, unable to avoid the one subject long.

Aunt Silence smiled a little over her crocheting. "No, indeed. Hop is quite amusing about Kate. I loan him to her while we are together, for that is

most of the time now, and he treats her as if she were a superior being. For a time he would only grunt when she spoke to him; then he informed me that, 'She heap fine woman,' and there has been no trouble since. He looks after Kate's interests just as he does after mine. I have known Kate for five years now, I met her the year before Mr. Talworth died, and Hop has taken care of us for almost four years."

"From what I have heard, Miss Talworth must have had rather a trying time with her uncle," Horton remarked.

"Well," said Aunt Silence, judicially, "if I had been Kate I should have mixed something permanently soothing with his coffee; but Kate is Kate, and after I saw something of them together I discovered that that old man was really fond of her; he couldn't help it. He and I used to fight like two Billy goats, it was diversion for him and took his mind off his pains and his money, and gave Kate a rest. I went up to Arrowhead Springs once to recover from too many luncheons, and there I met them—that yellow old man, and that beautiful girl, for you know, I think Kate the most beautiful woman I ever met, and a very unusual character. I regularly laid siege to her, and you have no idea of the difficulties I had, it was months before she even allowed me within arm's length, and now, though I know she loves me, Kate has her reservations. She is the most absolutely per-

fect person to dwell under the same roof with, and she is frank and sweet with me always, but I would no more think of questioning anything Kate does, or has done, than I would think of flying over to Anacapa Island and living on shell-fish. Different women accomplish things in different ways, that is if they have character enough to accomplish anything at all, and Kate's great strength is in her silence. Her fascination lies in what she does not say, and men are invariably devoted to her. Away back when she had no opportunity to meet anybody, only just the chance acquaintances at different places where they were—and Kate was not easy to meet—she had plenty of opportunities to leave that old man. The envious here love to say that it is her money, but it is not—it is just Kate. And I can understand it. If I were a man I should never be able to rest until I made her love me enough to tell me what it is she is really thinking and feeling. If I were a man I should go round the world for her, and if she were difficult I should be that much the more determined——" Mrs. Silence stopped for breath, apparently quite unconscious of Horton's flushed interest. He longed to ask her a question, and Aunt Silence perhaps surmised that he did, for she proceeded to answer him in a way.

"I have to confess," she said, "that I do not understand Kate. She is pre-eminently a woman who should marry. I know that she can be tremendously

interested in a man—devoted to him in a way few women would be, but she seems to be unable to bring herself to marry. I think she has a real distrust of marriage—at least so it seems to me—and a dislike to give up her independence. It is my settled quarrel with Kate,"—Mrs. Silence smiled,—"and a subject I have only dared discuss with her once. I shall never attempt it again, but I will be the lifelong friend of the man who will succeed in making her change her mind."

Horton smiled faintly, then he said, "Miss Talworth must find it hot in the city."

"She does," Aunt Silence replied, "and I wish she would come back. She says in her last letter that she will be only a day or two longer. I thought of course that my nephew, Richard Allison, was there, they always have plenty of business matters to discuss when there is nothing else, but she tells me that he has gone east, and she has not seen him. This morning I had a letter from him written on his way, and as usual he gives me advice about my real estate," —Mrs. Silence's manner was half amused, half annoyed,—"and he says he will be gone several weeks, no fixed address. He must have a dearth of business just now, or he wouldn't consent to a holiday—I didn't know he could be brought to take one." Aunt Silence's tone was slightly sarcastic. "You don't know my nephew, do you?" she said. "He is a very

clever man. I am really proud of him in some ways, but he gets on my nerves, too, he is so strenuous. He thinks I am wild because I choose to take my life in my own way, and I think he thinks too much of Richard Allison, so we do not always agree, but on the whole I am proud of him. He was a poor boy, and he has done wonders for himself. He is a brilliant lawyer, and a shrewd business man, and I expect him to be very rich one of these days. I have spent more than half my lifetime in Southern California and I have never known a man who understood its possibilities as Richard does. He has made a study of it. I think the thing I like best about my nephew is that he has clung to his profession in spite of the temptations he has had to just give himself up to money making."

"I have never met Mr. Allison," Horton said, "and I have only seen him once, years ago. I remember him as a forceful person even then."

"He is certainly that," Aunt Silence was positive. "Physically he is powerful, and mentally he is keen and inclined to be hard, but my nephew has his weaknesses also—and some very vulnerable spots."

"It is a type most women admire," said Horton, quietly.

"Well—perhaps——" Aunt Silence replied.

IX.

A FOGGY NIGHT

It was on a foggy night some ten days later that Horton stood before the bright fire in Kate's living-room, thoughtfully watching the sparks as they flew up the chimney. The fog was so heavy that it was almost a rain, and when Hop ushered him into the warmly-lighted room he had gone straight to the hearth-rug. The wind came in from the ocean, rolling the fog before it, and Horton had ridden the four miles from his hotel enveloped in its moist folds.

Kate had returned, and he had seen her several times. She complained that the city had been hot and tiring, and certainly she looked far from well. Her eyes were heavy, and her usually delicate color either wanting entirely, or deepened to an unnatural degree. She was either feverish in her animation, or so silent as to appear apathetic. Horton understood better now what it was that had previously impressed him as unusual in her manner; the touch of suppressed excitement had increased to a feverish unrest. Mrs. Silence observed her gravely, as did Horton, but neither made any comment. Her manner to Horton was friendly, but he was not blind, and he realized that he did not even hold her atten-

tion. With the desperation of the starving he had seized upon the crumb of friendship she had offered him, and fed upon it during her absence, but friendship demands some degree of confidence and consideration, and Kate seemed to have returned in a state of preoccupation too complete for remembrance. Horton doubted if in her abstraction she even half realized his presence. With whom were her thoughts, and for whom was the brooding look in her sombre eyes?

Horton had spent a week of suffering that had taken the light from his eyes, and brought lines into his face. A perfect torment of jealousy was gnawing at him, and he had come by degrees to the necessity of granting the futility of his suit; but the greater wretchedness lay in the realization of Kate's entire isolation from him. Through years he had carried with him the conviction of her unhappiness, but it settled upon him now with an intensity that was unbearable. The indifference with which she shut him out from any part in her very evident distress of mind cut to his most sensitive nerve of feeling. He had come to the point of actual desperation; he could no longer endure the position he was forced to occupy; his self-respect revolted from it. His love was growing into an obsession, yet he had no power whatever to move her. She passed him by—his very presence was futile, unnecessary.

Horton was so intent on the shifting visions in the

fire that he did not hear the soft sweep of Kate's gown, or feel her presence, until she was almost beside him. "What absolute concentration," she said, in her sweet voice, and Horton turned quickly, his sullen brows lifting, his lips twitching slightly as he looked at her. "I am sorry you have been neglected so long," she continued, "but Aunt Silence is out for dinner and an evening of bridge, and I was too lazy to dress. I hurried when I heard your step on the porch."

"Why did you trouble," he said. "You know perfectly well, Kate, that you are beautiful to me no matter what you wear. I had all sorts of preferences in colors until the last two weeks; now they are equally lovely—except black. I like you best in that, for I first saw you in it. I am glad you are wearing it to-night." She had not given him her hand, and they stood side by side.

"I like it best myself," she said, quietly; "it is such a convenient color. . . . I am afraid you found it a disagreeable ride along the beach. I stayed out on the bank just as long as I could stand it before dinner. It was wonderful watching the fog roll along over the water. My hair was quite wet when I came in."

"It is soft and dry now." He looked down at the loose wave that almost hid her small ear, and watched the firelight touch it into gold. Her gown was simple

in the extreme, cut square in the neck, a plain black edge against her white skin. There was a gleam of white arm beneath the clinging open-work of her sleeve, but she wore no ornament whatever. The muscles in Horton's cheek twitched, and he set his jaw hard. "Kate," he said, very low, "I am going away—I came to-night to tell you."

She was quite silent, not looking at him, and then she said in tones as low as his, "I think you are right. . . . I wanted you to see for yourself how it is."

He continued. "I have tried not to bother you, these last few days, but before I go I want to say something. I don't need to tell you that I love you, you know it—as well as I. It's been in every word I have uttered, in every look I have given you—almost ever since I first saw you; it is the very air I breathe—it is every atom and particle of me—you have my every thought, my innermost desire—they are yours alone. I could go on talking about myself but you have no real interest to give me, and there is no call for it. . . . I don't know what it is that is weighing on you, Kate, but you are not a happy woman, and I know that better now after seeing you during these last two weeks than I did in all those years when I had only the remembrance of you to think of. There is something all wrong in your life, and this is what I wanted to say—if there is anything that I could do for you—if you would only have confidence

enough in me to trust me—I would serve you faithfully, and I think I could forget myself; I should try. I want you to understand that, Kate; that if you ever need me, I am yours to command. . . . I am going away—up to my ranch—and perhaps I shall go east afterwards—I am not sure—but if ever you have a word for me it will find me there or be forwarded to me. I shall not be able to stay away always, I must have a sight of you—once in a long time—and there is no use, I *cannot* choke every particle of hope out of myself——" Horton stopped. Kate had listened without moving, her eyes on the fire, and Horton had seen the color slowly flood her face, and even her neck. It faded away, leaving her very pale; she looked like the troubled girl of his first recollection, white-faced and tired.

"I wanted to spare you—and myself—just this sort of thing," she said, with difficulty. "That is one reason why I never let you know where I was. I have known about you, up at your ranch, the big tracts you have reclaimed, and the busy life you have lived, for some time. I knew you were the same Horton Payne who was so thoughtful of a helpless, wretched girl, and I remembered it all so distinctly that I would make no sign. . . . I told you that I was your debtor; I still am—I think I always will be. If there were any way in which you could help me, I should ask you to do so, but there is none now,

and I don't know what may be in the future. I decided on my course years ago, and I shall not change from it. I have never known talking to mend matters. Things are as they are, and I cannot change them, nor you, nor any one else. I appear—I know how I appear—but I cannot help it,"—her lips trembled,—"I cannot think of love and marriage like other women—they do not come into my life."

"Kate, you imagine some sort of a bond to some one or something—I don't pretend to say what—but you are shutting yourself away from happiness because of it."

"Possibly," she said, her lips tightening.

"Tell me this," and his voice rose slightly, "if you felt free to think of love and marriage like other women as you say, is there some one—Kate, is there some one whom you love?" She was silent, and he bent to see her face. "Tell me the truth, Kate," he said, his voice dropping to a whisper. "I shall have to bear it. . . . Is it Richard Allison?"

"Yes."

"So—" he said, evenly, "I was quite right." He lifted his head and looked about him, a glance vacant and restless. "I will just be off—I have no business here—I only take up room." The misery in his voice needed no inflection, and Kate turned to him with a cry of pain.

"Oh, don't!" she said. "Why do you make me

hurt you like this. I do love Richard—you don't know what he has been to me since—during the time I have known him. I think I should have gone wild with loneliness without him. You force me to say what I have never said to him—no matter how much he has urged me. He has begged me for years to—to marry him; he has done everything he could think of to make me care for him, and I would not. I could not, for I was afraid of the future, and I know now I was right. I could help him in some ways, and think constantly of his welfare—that was all. I told you I would marry nobody—*nobody!*"

"Yes," he replied, turning away, "I suppose it is a consolation. . . . Why, Kate, I haven't a word to say. I have only thrust myself where I don't belong, and I will go—it will be all right, you know, don't you bother about me——"

"But it is not!" she exclaimed. "I cannot let you go like this!" She took a step after him and put a detaining hand on his arm. "Horton, please listen to me—please." The tears rose in her eyes.

He turned his head and looked down at her, and the blood rushed to his temples, his heavy brows lifting, his eyes afire, "Don't you know—you shouldn't touch me," he said, indistinctly. "I—oh, *Kate!*" He had whirled about, and his arms went round her, drawing her to him, and holding her close, not roughly, but with a strength that left her powerless.

He held her to his breast without a word, for breathless moments, his lips in her hair. "I cannot help it, —I *cannot,*" he said, brokenly. He sought her cheek, but she turned her face against his breast with a sigh, and he bent and kissed her where the thick coil of her hair rested on her neck. "Can I help loving you, Kate?" he whispered. "Can I help it?" He loosened his hold at last, and she drew herself away, and walked unsteadily to the couch by the fire, brushing the hair from her face with a trembling hand; she was scarlet and shaking. Horton stood and watched her, then came to her side, standing and looking down at her, his face grown very white. "I deserve anything you choose to say to me," he said.

"I have nothing to say," she replied, trying to speak steadily. "I suppose as you say you cannot help—but I have too much anxiety already, and you add to it; you make me still more unhappy. . . . Please go and stop thinking about me—that is all I ask—please go! I will try to forget to-night——" Her voice was beyond her control.

"I asked you to trust me," he said, in bitter self-reproach, "and I could act like that! You will think there is no reverence in my love."

"I don't analyze what has been offered me under that name, not you alone, but others," Kate said, with the first touch of bitterness that he had ever heard from her. She looked up with a flash of the white

scorn he remembered so well, but at the utter wretchedness of his aspect, her look changed. "I am cruel," she said, more gently, "I know that you have tried—but I have suffered so——"

The muscles in his cheek twitched. "I am only human," he said, huskily.

"I know, I know." She rose and held out her hand to him. "I will not take back what I said to you the other evening—I have few enough who care for me, and I need every friend I possess. In spite of a wild moment like that, I feel that you would set aside your own interests if it would help me." She smiled faintly. "I never quarrel with those who really love me," she added.

Horton flushed warmly. "You know how to forgive—royally," he said, his eyes grown moist, and he bent to kiss her hand. "I would rather have a kind word from you, Kate, than a world full of other people's love." He straightened his shoulders, and turned for his hat, then stood still, his face working. "Neither he nor any one else can take *that* bit of heaven away from me!" he added, passionately.

X.

MRS. SILENCE MEDDLES

Mrs. Silence had gone for the third time to the end of the porch that commanded a view of the winding driveway between the oaks, but there was no sign of the horseman for whom she was looking. The heat of the July afternoon shimmered on the unshaded stretch of road, and the clusters of blueywhite solanum hung listless, half withered in the hot glare. The numerous sprinklers that kept the green of the lawn a bright tint in spite of the heat, whirled their sprays aloft, each drop showing every color of the rainbow before it descended to glisten on the grass.

Mrs. Silence's eyes were as unclouded as usual, but there was a rise at the inner corners of her eyebrows that formed a network of wrinkles on her forehead, changing the entire expression of her cheerful face. Aunt Silence had settled the Whites to her satisfaction, and given her house a vigorous cleaning, but she had come back to Kate's to find a changed household. She had said little, and she and Hop had consulted over the refractory ducks and sterile hens as usual, but they had also consulted over other matters, and the result of Hop's information, and a daily

observation of Kate's face had brought that troubled lift to Aunt Silence's brow.

The result was that she had taken a decisive step. She had written a short letter to Horton Payne, addressing it to his ranch. Evidently he had been absent, for she had waited three days before she received his message. It was brief—"I am starting at once," he said. "Will reach you to-morrow afternoon."

A horseman had turned in now at the stone-pillared gateway, and Mrs. Silence descended the steps, meeting him in the road. He had dismounted, and flung his horse's bridle over the hitching post, turning quickly to meet her. They shook hands, and Aunt Silence said, "Come to the seat under the trees. It is cooler there, and we can talk better there than in the house."

Horton had said nothing, but as he followed her he lifted his hat and wiped his brow. He had ridden rapidly, and a good part of the road was unshaded. Hop came out with whiskey and ice, but Horton scarcely touched his glass; his grave eyes were on Aunt Silence's face. "What is it, Mrs. Silence?" he asked.

"I hardly know," she replied. "That is what I want you to find out." Aunt Silence's nimble fingers were rarely idle, but just now she sat very straight in her chair, her hands clasped in her lap.

"I am afraid my letter frightened you," she said, conscious of the drawn lines about his mouth, and the anxiety of his expression. "I tried not to say too much, but I have been dreadfully worried."

"A misfortune to Kate is a misfortune to me," he answered, simply.

Aunt Silence nodded. "I know—you love Kate."

"I have loved her for years," said Horton.

"I generally make up my mind about people," Mrs. Silence said, "and I like you. I think you would help Kate in a difficulty—under any circumstances."

"Certainly. I have told her so," he replied. "She knows it."

"Yes, I think she does—I am certain she does. You see I sent for you and then I was in a panic. It is the first time I ever meddled in Kate's affairs. Last night I had your message, and I couldn't stand it any longer. 'Kate,' I said, 'Horton Payne is coming to-morrow.' I was too frightened to make any explanation. She looked at me as if she hardly heard me. 'I know,' she said. 'I wrote to him to come.' "

"I did not get it," said Horton, quickly. The sunburn had deepened in his cheeks.

"You must have just missed it," Aunt Silence said. "Kate is lying down now, until dinner, and she wished me to receive you and ask you if you would come back later in the evening to see her. I don't

know why, but I think she wanted me to see you first and talk to you."

"Is she ill?" Horton asked, anxiously.

"I think she is almost beside herself with worry," said Mrs. Silence, "but over just what I don't know. I have had to reach conclusions through guess work mostly, only this I do know, something is terribly wrong with Kate, and she will not be able to stand it much longer. You saw her before she went away—she has always been like that ever since I have known her, cheerful and eventempered. Sometimes she was very quiet, and sometimes I was afraid she was not very happy, but that was all. You saw the change in her after she returned from Los Angeles. You left then, and I went down a day or so later to Los Angeles. I was gone almost two weeks, and just before I returned I received a short letter from Kate. It was not in her usual manner—I know her so well in some ways. It seemed to me that she was laboring under a strain, or unusual excitement of some sort. She said that for years she had wanted the kind of interest and affection that a child would bring into her life, but that she would not marry. That she had given a great deal of thought to the subject, and that she had finally determined to adopt a child. She said that the young girl she had determined to adopt was of good family, and charming, and she felt certain that when I knew her, I would extend

to her some of the affection I had always shown Kate herself." Aunt Silence's voice faltered slightly. "Then she said a little about her feeling for me, things she had never put into words before, though I knew she felt them—and that was all. An earthquake couldn't have given me a worse shock. I thought back over our acquaintance, and there were many things that went to show the truth of what she said. Kate is passionately fond of children; she always has them about her, and I have thought a hundred times when I have seen her with them, what a mother she would make. That was what I meant when I said that she was a woman who should marry. I think one of the strongest things in Kate's character is her capacity for maternal tenderness. I am certain that it is the secret of her love for Richard Allison. He has always appealed to that side of her nature, and he on his part admires her beyond anything. There is nothing I have ever known that has interested me more than their affection for each other, and certainly Richard has proved himself a persistent and determined lover. I am telling you all this for I want you to understand Kate as I do.

"There is another thing: I discovered some time ago how Kate spent the larger part of her income, and it gave me a side light on her character. She lives most simply and inexpensively for a woman of her means, but she seems to use her income to the last

penny. It was quite by accident that I found that she gave regularly and almost lavishly to a number of charitable institutions, all of them for children. There is one home for crippled and homeless children in Los Angeles that she almost entirely supports. She will do none of these things in her own name, and has never mentioned the subject to me, intimately as I know her. It is one of the reservations of which I spoke the other day. I had realized a craving in Kate for some outlet for her natural tenderness, but the idea of her taking such a step as the adoption of a child had never occurred to me for an instant.

"I came back here in a very mixed state of mind, and met Kate's new daughter." Aunt Silence paused, her brows lifting into their troubled expression. "I don't know why I expected to see a child, but I did, and I had another surprise. She is little and slender, but it is a young woman Kate has adopted, no child. She is as quiet and inoffensive, as anxious to please, and as little obtrusive as one could wish, but she is as marked a personality in her way as Kate herself. I do not admire her," said Aunt Silence, firmly, "but you might think her beautiful. She makes me think of something soft—and dangerous. She tries to sit like other people, but forgets and curls up like a cat, and she walks as lightly. She is particularly attentive to me, but I don't like her." Mrs. Silence's mouth lifted at the corner. "I am a little jealous, and consequently prejudiced, for

I have watched Kate with her new-found treasure, and anything sweeter, or more pathetic than Kate with that girl, I have never seen. Not even an enemy of Kate's—if she has such a thing—could smile at the tenderness and thoughtful attention Kate bestows on her, and I will say for Paquita that she tries to receive it—gratefully."

"What is her name?" Horton asked, abruptly.

Mrs. Silence sat a little straighter. "Now you ask me a question that will explain one of my reasons for wanting to see you. I have talked a little to Kate's adopted daughter, and she has told me a few things about herself. She says that she is a connection of the Paynes of Summit Hill, and if that is so, she is a relation of your own. Her name is Frances Payne, and she says that the Spanish girls at The Sisters' called her Paquita. She says that she is not Spanish, though she has always lived among Spanish people."

"What else did she tell you?" Horton asked, in a voice so changed that Mrs. Silence looked at him curiously. A flush of excitement had risen to her cheeks.

"Not much," she replied, "except that her parents had practically abandoned her, leaving her to be cared for by these Spanish people. She said that she had been educated at The Sisters' and at St. Mary's in San Francisco. She told me all this because I questioned her, but her answers were per-

fectly straightforward. If she has been among Spanish people all her life I can understand some of her ways." Aunt Silence stopped, and Horton sat silent, his eyes on the ground.

Her manner was less incisive when she spoke again. "I haven't told you," she said, "that I knew your father and your step-father slightly; they were out here a good deal in earlier times. I know the Payne features well. You are very like your father. This girl is a Payne—there is no mistaking those brows, and that mouth."

Horton looked up. "And Kate?" he said.

Aunt Silence sighed. "Oh, yes, it is Kate I am thinking of, too. Paquita may be anybody for all I care, and I would be only too glad to feel that she was the source of happiness to Kate—I would even try to be fond of Paquita for Kate's sake, but this condition of things is unbearable. Kate looks fearfully." Aunt Silence's voice faltered again. "I asked her the other day to *please* tell me what was the matter, but she was short with me—the first time she has ever spoken so to me. I persevered, however, and begged her to let me send for Richard Allison, for if it was any sort of money difficulty he could straighten it out for her, and she told me that he was the last person she wished to see. Then she tried to speak as usual, and said she was simply feeling nervous and ill. I couldn't get anything else from her." Aunt Silence paused, lowering her voice.

"I did write to him, though I only told him that Kate was not well. I suppose that I have meddled generally, but Richard has looked after Kate's affairs for a long time, and certainly if Kate is in need of legal advice for any reason, he is competent to give it."

Horton was silent again, then he said, "You spoke of more than one reason for sending for me, Mrs. Silence."

Aunt Silence hesitated, but her manner gathered firmness as she went on. "I may be wrong, but I shall tell you exactly what I think. I have concluded that in some way Kate has been involved in difficulties because of this girl, and it is a member of your family who is responsible for it. I have only this from which to judge; there has been a man here several times, when I was away, and after I came back. He was here the other day, and Kate talked to him the better part of an afternoon. I met him face to face in the driveway, and if I had not known that your stepfather died more than ten years ago, I should have said that it was he. I may be a trouble-making old woman, but after I had seen Kate's face that evening, and she told me nothing, neither she nor Paquita, I wrote to you. I felt sure of only two things—one was that family matters are best kept in the family, and the other was that I would trust you to stand by Kate under any circumstances."

Horton met Aunt Silence's clear eyes steadily. "Thank you," he said.

XI.

THE USES OF ADVERSITY

"It is better here, Kate," Horton said. "Let me put this around you, for when the sun is gone it will be cooler, and your dress is thin."

"There doesn't seem to be a breath from the ocean," said Kate. "I have never known so warm an evening here." She allowed Horton to arrange the shawl on the bench, and when she was seated, he drew the two ends up over her shoulders. They were very near the water, each swell of the incoming tide leaving a line of foam at the foot of the rock on which they sat. It was a large flat rock lying just beneath the bank, at full tide its surface barely above the water. The bank behind it was steep, and green with its mat of yellow-flowering mesembryanthemum. They had come down the narrow path, and Kate had pointed out the seat to him.

"It is the third bench I have had put there," she had said. "When there is a storm, it washes over the rock and carries the seat away—this one is chained."

Horton had made the bench as comfortable as he could for her, and he sat beside her now waiting until she chose to speak. He had come back as Mrs. Silence had bidden him, and Kate had said, "Let us go down to the beach—the house is stifling."

Horton had been too shocked at her appearance to make any reply. From what Aunt Silence had said he had expected to find her looking ill, but he was not prepared for such a change. She was deadly pale, the pallor of suffering, her always sombre eyes, dark-ringed and heavy. Her cheek had lost its curve, and there were tense lines about her mouth. She spoke and moved more deliberately than usual, but it was with the air of one quite unconscious of her surroundings. Horton felt a choking sensation of pain as he looked at her. He had spent a wretched enough three weeks since he had last seen Kate, and Mrs. Silence's summons had thrown him into a torment of anxiety, which the conversation of the earlier afternoon had only served to increase. He had not questioned Mrs. Silence, it would be Kate's place to explain, but an intense anger had been steadily growing in him. He nervously clenched and unclenched his hand, and it was all he could do to speak calmly.

"This hot wind comes from over the mountains," he said. "It has the desert smell—like sand in the sun."

She did not appear to hear him; her eyes were on the swell and heave of the water. In the distance a coast steamer was outlined against the blue of the horizon, and in the foreground two tiny sail-boats scudded along, their bits of canvas pink tinted in the level rays of the sinking sun. The shadow of the

bank behind them touched them where they sat, and the rush of water subdued every sound. Kate was watching a piece of bark that the waves rolled up on the sand and left, coming back to seize it again and drag it far out on the water. "You did not receive my letter," she said, finally.

"No, Mrs. Silence wrote also—hers came first."

"It was all the same," she said, dully. "I only asked you to come—that was all. I couldn't write what I had to say, and it had reached a point where I had to call upon you—it seemed to me that you were the only help I had left."

"Kate, you drive me beside myself!" Horton exclaimed. "Mrs. Silence told me a little, and I have been left to guess the rest—for pity's sake tell me what it is in the fewest words."

Kate straightened a little, turning to look up at him. "Aunt Silence told you of Paquita?" she said.

"Yes."

"She is my daughter."

"Yes—you have adopted her—Mrs. Silence told me."

"But she is my daughter—my *own* daughter——" she paused.

"You mean——?" Horton grew white.

"You must have guessed—she is my daughter, and your cousin James is her father. He took her away from me when she was a baby."



"ANYTHING BUT THAT!" HE SAID

Horton drew his arm from the back of the seat where it rested and rose abruptly, standing and looking down at her; his voice was very quiet. "James is your husband then—or was? . . . It would explain a good deal."

Her face twitched, and she moistened her lips, but she looked up at him steadily. "No," she said, "but I was not to blame."

A wild look crossed his face, lifting his brows. Then his jaw set, his brows lowering into their straight line. "Anything but that," he said through his teeth, and so low that Kate hardly caught it. "Anything but *that!*"

"I was not to blame," she repeated. "I did not know——" Horton interrupted her with a muttered exclamation, and turning his back walked to the edge of the rock, and stood looking out over the water. The blood had surged into his face. "I have thought of everything else," he said to himself, "but not that—never that—I *would not* think it."

Kate bent forward a little, watching him, her tired eyes anxious, the lines in her forehead more marked. There was a faint look of wonder in her expression as she observed his attitude. When he turned again to her she studied his face thoughtfully, but it was without expression. "I did not mean to interrupt," he said, evenly. "You startled me—just for the moment. I know you were not to blame—certainly

you were not—only it startled me. You see I wouldn't be a sane, thinking human being if I had not tried to explain to my mind some things that—that—were mysterious about you, but my explanations were never anything like this—but it does not change my opinion of you—there is *nothing* will do that, Kate." The set muscles of his face began to twitch in spite of his effort.

As he spoke the puzzled look faded from Kate's face, and at the emphasis of his last sentence she flushed a painful scarlet. She spoke quickly and clearly. "When I married your cousin he was already married—he never told me—afterwards I found his wife was living. If you had let me finish——"

"Kate!" said Horton, in smothered tones. "How could I!" He had come back to her, his breath coming and going unevenly. "I have been so wild with anxiety—and so in the dark—" he said, huskily. "It is the first time I have let a doubt of you come in my mind. . . . I don't know what to say to you——" He was beside her again, and as Kate looked down at the trembling hand that pressed his knee, her face softened into an expression of tenderness. She leaned over and touched it gently. "Don't," she said, almost in a whisper. "You have given me years of loyalty—that is why I have called

on you now. What does the doubt of a moment matter. I should have begun differently."

He caught her hand and held it, but his look had changed. "He shall answer for it—I swear he shall," he said. His voice rose. "He never did a straight thing in his life—he was born crooked; but he has reached his limit now!" The anger that the shock of a moment had driven out of his mind was returning. "When Mrs. Silence talked to me this afternoon, I knew that his hand was in this business, but I never suspected such a thing as this—yet in an instant a thousand things are explained." He was breathing quickly. "You are going to tell me more, Kate—I can act better then. It shall be the last bit of villainy *he* will undertake——"

"But do you mean you can make him leave me alone, me and my child, and not drag things out for people to gloat over?" She sat up, her eyes grown brilliant, her lips quivering. She drew her hand from his and clasped the other that lay in her lap. "He—he is terrible—no, you don't know. . . . If you could do that for me—!" she ended in a sob, covering her face with her hands.

"I can—*damn him!*" Horton said. "Kate you poor child——" He put his arm about her shoulders and drew her to him, for she was sobbing aloud.

"Oh, to think of that—after these weeks! . . . You don't know, you don't know!"

"I think I do know," he said in a low voice. "Don't worry any more, dearest. You should have told me fifteen years ago—what do you think it would have mattered to me—a thing like that. Kate, why did you hide yourself away, and put happiness out of your life? Fifteen years in which to love you! There was no one between us then—but now——"

She dropped her hands, looking up into his face. "I was like a stray dog," she said. "A dog that has been beaten all over and kicked. I had no name, no home, nothing. I was ruined and cast out to do for myself. I shrank from every look that was given me; from every hand that was stretched out to me. I didn't know anything better than to hide."

Horton uttered a passionate word, and Kate drew herself up, brushing the hair back from her forehead with an impatient gesture. "It was because I was all alone when I was a girl," she said. "You can't understand unless you know. There was no one to give me advice, and I was so terribly lonely. . . . I had lost my father and mother when I was a little girl. I don't remember my father at all, and my mother just dimly. She was studying art in Paris when she met my father, and there was a sort of secret marriage. He was an Englishman of very good family, and when his people discovered his marriage there was dreadful trouble. My life began all wrong from the beginning. My mother was an American and

poor, and they refused to countenance her. I think my father was loyal to her, but there was trouble between them after a time. There was a separation then and my mother kept me with her. My father died in England, and my mother a little over a year later in Paris. I remember her face and the room in which she was ill—that is all I remember. My father's people did not want me in England. They sent over a governess for me, and it was with her that I travelled to different places. We were a long time in Eisenach——"

"It was there I went to trace you," said Horton. "As I told you I went to Herr Tupfer's. Frau Tupfer was dead, but Herr Tupfer remembered you, but not your name. He remembered the name of your governess, Miss Wheedon. I found it in a hotel register in Dresden also, but yours was not given. It was all I could find, and I searched carefully."

Kate continued without noticing his interruption. Her manner was eager, as if to speak afforded her relief. "Miss Wheedon was kind to me," she said, "but she must have been acting under instructions, for she told me almost nothing of my father's people. When I was fourteen she told me that it was the wish of those who had provided for me that I should finish my education in America, and live there, and I was sent over to New York; Miss Wheedon did not

go with me. I was sent to a girl's school in Philadelphia, and I remained there for two years.

"It was an entirely different life from any I had had before; with Miss Wheedon I had travelled about, and I loved the interesting places we visited, the pictures, and the music. I did not like the teachers in the school, and did not feel at home with the girls. It was just that I was not used to the American atmosphere, and that I realized I had no home and no one at all to care for me. When the girls went home in the holidays, I stayed at the school, except for a short visit or two with some one of the girls. It was dreary."

"Did the teachers know nothing about your family?" Horton asked.

"Very little," said Kate. "Only what I knew myself. My tuition was paid through a Philadelphia bank, and I had a moderate allowance for my own use. The head teacher had received a letter of instructions through the bank stating that I was an orphan and that I should remain with her until I was eighteen, and after that I should be sent to some college and be fitted for a teacher. I learned from the bank that when I reached the age of eighteen, if I were unmarried, I should have a sum of money paid to me, and that would end my connection with my English relatives. In case I married in the meantime, I was to receive the money at once. It was

something like putting a price on my head." Kate had regained much of her usual calmness of manner, but a spot of color began to burn in her cheeks, and Horton looked at her pityingly. "During my last summer at the school, I met your step-brother; James Selwyn he called himself, and I never knew that he had deceived me about his name as he did about everything else, until the other afternoon when you told me the history of your family. I understood then the strong resemblance between you. I felt when I first met you that there must be some relationship, and I was eager to avoid you, but you explained it fully that afternoon." Kate stopped, shivering and drawing the shawl closer about her neck. "He found it easy to make me love him," she said. "Nobody had even pretended to love me before. I was hungry for affection. The school was empty, the head teacher at the seashore, no one paid any particular attention to me; he had a free field. A more experienced girl than I might have been persuaded. He told me he was without relations, much like myself, and that he was comfortably well off. He persuaded me to be married to him before the school opened, and simply to write to the head teacher and notify her of the fact. He had found out all about the money that was coming to me at the bank." Kate's quivering lip lifted. "I was just sixteen, our marriage was fully vouched for, my eight thousand dol-

lars—for that was all there was—was paid over to me, and he took me away from even the one or two people who knew me.

"He took me to New Orleans and I was happy for a time. Then I began to find out things, one thing after another. I think a sudden disillusion is better than that kind of protracted agony. I found first of all that I was a sort of incident to my husband—he had my money—he spent it as he liked. He was never rough with me—I simply didn't count at all. I was just a young girl, and the sort of women he cared for were those who were as sharp and experienced as he. When I became too wretched to conceal it he sometimes made love to me. You said of his father, 'he caressed her with one hand while he stole with the other,'—it was like that with him. All these things came first. In the beginning he kept me away from the people who were his companions, but in time he became careless, and when I could overcome my wretchedness over his neglect enough to pay some attention to those around me, I was dazed by the kind of people who seemed to be his friends. He was always promoting some scheme, but nothing legitimate. The men who came to his rooms frightened me, and the women made me ill. I had never known such people; I did not know they existed. Toward the end, he even brought such men as that creature on the train; he brought that very man. I cannot

tell you all the schemes I overheard discussed, and some of the things that I knew were going on. I was almost out of my mind with misery and terror, for it had taken me the better part of a year to discover the truth—that I had married a thoroughly bad man, a man of the underworld, a human bird of prey. Those men do exist; they seem to be born to fill their place in the world. James had beauty, and charm of manner, the appearance of a man who had the ancestry of a gentleman. He is just the rotten branch of a good tree. There is something strange in his cast of mind, something subtle and cruel, like a creature unbalanced, and at the same time he is so highly reasonable—I cannot express it. His brain evolves scheme after scheme, but they all bear the same stamp.

"When my inexperience had grasped all this I had terrible things to consider. He no longer made any pretence of devotion to me; he knew I understood, and he left me alone and waited to see what I would do." Kate stopped, and then went on with great difficulty and Horton looked down on the rock at his feet, his face very white. "Whatever he might be, he was the father of my child," said Kate in a voice so low that Horton scarcely caught it, "and I was utterly helpless, without money, and nowhere to go. My baby would come very soon—I had to think. . . . I wanted just a little of my money so

that I could leave him, and when I was able, find something to do for myself and the child. I tried not to anger James, I only said that I knew he would be better satisfied if he did not have to bother about me, and if he would give me a little money I would go, and take care of myself after that—his manner had become so casual to me that I could think of no better way to approach him. To my surprise and relief he thought a minute, then laughed, and said he had no objection—he would see about the money in a day or two. Then he carefully avoided me for days, and I realized that he had no intention of allowing me to leave him, that for some reason he meant to keep me in his grasp, under his eye, though otherwise leaving me alone. What plan or scheme he was harboring now I could not fathom, but I had endured too much; he entered my presence one day and I went wild—I was really beside myself. I told him that I would go that day before the authorities and tell them all I knew of his lottery schemes, and other things that the police would like to hear. I told him in the strongest language I knew how I felt to him, my contempt, my loathing, and my disgust, the creature he was in the eyes of any decent human being. He stood and took it all quietly, just his brows drawn down, and his mouth smiling. When I stopped he asked me very quietly if there was anything more? If not, he had a word to say, and it was this: that he was about

done with New Orleans, and ready to leave. That I would have some difficulty in substantiating my statements after I had made them, and that the authorities I talked of so glibly would have a still greater difficulty in finding him in the unlikely case of their wanting him. That if I wished to consult the police, he would give me a few facts that really concerned me, and that perhaps would be worth while. I might tell them, he said, that I was not his wife, for that was a fact. That he had been quite innocent of any intention of breaking the laws of his country, he had thought his first wife dead when he married me, but he had since learned that he was mistaken. He declared that he had had this knowledge only a short time. He very deliberately showed me the proofs of his marriage, and letters from his wife. He spoke feelingly of his distress on my account. He asked me what I wished him to do. He remarked that he considered it no time for me to be exciting myself over matters that did not concern me, that I had a great enough grievance of my own. He supposed that his advice would have no weight with me, but he would like to suggest that I allow him to see that I was well cared for during the next few weeks, and that for the sake of our child I would not make our misfortune a piece of public property. That when I was well again I would be far better able to judge what step would be best to take, and where it would

be well for me and the child to go. When that time came he declared he had no wish to oppose any plan of mine that was for the benefit of our child, for it was his as well as mine he reminded me, and if I should persist in any such foolish thing as running off with inadequate means, and no sensible plans for the trial that awaited me, he most certainly would follow me.

"He had turned me to stone. I could say nothing. I believed him absolutely regarding his first marriage, except that I was certain he was aware of all the facts before he married me; he had needed eight thousand dollars badly—that was all. It is not an unusual method of procuring money; the papers almost daily give us disagreeable details, only they so rarely apply to ourselves. . . . When he was ready he had told me of it. He knew me well enough to be certain that I would not publish my shame, even if I doubted the positive statement of his guiltlessness. I thought at that time that he feared to let me go until he was ready to disappear. His lottery scheme, or some other was not ripe yet, and he wanted no possible interference with his plans. When he was ready he would go and leave me behind; he would be quietly and effectually rid of me—and the child. The whole thing was so like him, such a combination of shrewdness and revenge, with an opportunity for fine acting on his part, that I recognized his generalship. I sat dumb before him. I was not thinking just then

of him, or myself, I was thinking of my child. Afterwards it all seemed clear to me, what was his object, and his intention, and I did what appeared wisest to me at the time.

"He finished talking and I managed to reach my room and shut myself in. I lay down on my bed and I stayed there for hours, just lying still. If I had been a woman who wept and screamed easily, I should have beaten my head against the wall. If it had not been for the one great thought that was growing in me, I should have gone insane." Kate's voice had dropped even lower. "When I lay down the sun was warm on the bed, and when I began to plan as well as suffer, it was dark, and the stars in the sky. I could see them from where I lay. For weeks I had been wild with anxiety and terror for what was before me, but now I was perfectly calm. I myself had passed out of existence—it had gone with my girlhood, with a thousand things that had meant so much. There was an immense strength growing in me—I cannot tell it to you—no man would know—if you look for it you will see it in the face of the Madonna—I think it was that." Her eyes had widened and deepened, her voice sweet in its modulation; the present had vanished; she was back again, passing through her hour of trial. "I don't know what is the strength that is given to women who are beset by terrible anxieties, and have a life to guard, but I know it

was given to me. There was a tremendous peace resting on me, and everything but that one great fact faded away. For what was to be mine, I could face the whole world of suffering and sin and not be afraid. I would find a way out in the end." Her eyes had gone to the wide expanse of water, and she dropped into silence. The man beside her breathed gently lest he disturb her. She had drawn back an edge of the curtain that hid her soul and allowed him to look in. She was far away from any realization of the present, moving with the shadows of past thoughts. The sensitive cord, the capacity to understand, vibrated in him. There was a tightening in his throat, and a pricking pain in his eyelids. A quiver crossed Kate's face, and her look came back to the rock on which they sat, and then to Horton motionless beside her, and she sighed.

"I went on with my life as if I had not had cause for that night of suffering. We had a part of a house that was kept by a creole woman, and there were other lodgers, but I could keep by myself. I almost never saw James and we never referred to that afternoon. I had acceded to his plan, it seemed best, but I had made up my mind about the future. I saved every penny of money that I could, and I sold what little jewelry I had, to add to my little store. The creole woman was kind to me. I think that no woman who had a particle of womanhood in her could

have helped being so. She thought either that my husband neglected me shamefully, or that I was in the questionable position of more than one woman who had lived in her house. I know she pitied me, but I had no explanation to make to her. I simply kept silence. She promised to look after me when I was ill, and I think she did so to the best of her ability. I was very ill, I almost died, but I knew my baby was living, for they put her in my arms just for a little while." Kate paused, her eyes slowly filling. "That moment was worth to me all that I had endured. I think I was born that I might have that few moments' happiness. It will stay with me as long as I live." She stopped again, trying to control her voice, then went on more rapidly.

"I was ill a long time, I had fever and was unconscious, and they took me to the hospital. At first when I was well enough to ask they would not tell me, but they were forced to finally. They said that my child had only lived a short time, that she had died just after they had brought me to the hospital. I was ill for weeks after that—I don't know why I lived at all, but I did, and at last I was at liberty to go. He had never come to the hospital, and the nurses asked me very few questions. He had sent them enough for my expenses and I let them think what they wished. I only wanted to get away and hide myself, and I was in an agony of terror lest he should,

for some reason of his own, follow me up. All my courage seemed to have died with my child. I had put the little money I had saved in a bank and I almost fainted with fear when I went to get it. The one thing I wanted was to get away as far as I could from his neighborhood. I knew in an indefinite way that my mother had had a brother somewhere in California. They had quarrelled, and all I knew of him was through some old letters of his to her. His address at that time was a certain bank in St. Louis, and I still hoped to learn something of him from them. When the anxieties of the last months had forced me to think of any means of helping myself, I had written to them, but no answer had reached me. The hope of hearing from them was one of the possibilities to which I had clung up to the very last. I could not bear the thought of going to any one who had known me, for I regarded myself as an outcast, and the necessity of telling my story would be an agony. If I could go where I was not known it would be better, and there would be less chance of his finding me in the future. I do not know why I felt so certain that he would not wish to lose sight of me, but the fear obsessed me. If I found my uncle possibly he would protect me; if he were kind to me I felt I could tell him everything.

"After I drew out my little sum of money, I went directly to the station, and took the first train for St.

Louis. I did not stop trembling for hours; I was like a hunted thing, afraid of my own shadow. I arrived in St. Louis at noon and found the bank, and the first ray of hope I had was when they said that my uncle was living, and though they had no exact address they thought he might be found here, in Moneta. That he was an invalid, and his movements uncertain. It was all too indefinite for me to risk writing, and I had fear pushing me on also. I counted my money carefully; I had enough to pay for the journey and to keep me for a short time, and I determined to take the risk. I was not afraid of work if my search were not successful. I bought a few things and I almost missed my train. It was you who gave me your berth, and the sight of you frightened me terribly—for one instant I thought it was James, and then I thought there must be a relationship, the resemblance was so strong. . . . Then there was that man. He came to his seat not ten minutes afterwards, and I was sick with terror. I had only stepped into other difficulties. He was determined to question me about James, who had 'cleared' from New Orleans, he said, and left the others in the lurch. He threatened to follow me until I should tell him everything I knew about James. I am certain that it was he who stole some of my money. I was too frightened to know what I was doing, and I left most of it in my bag, and the next morning it was gone. I can never tell you

what gratitude I felt to you when you kept that brute from me. With James's face I felt you must be like him, but I thought so only a very short time. If it had not been that you reminded me of him constantly, the way you spoke, the way you held your head, when you frowned, a hundred things, and also that I began to feel that you—that it was not—just that you were sorry for me, but that you—that you cared—" Kate flushed, hesitating, "I should have acted differently to you."

Horton spoke with difficulty. "And it was James I ran up against in the hotel corridor that night, and it was the sight of him that drove you out into the rain——" He was shaking in his strong endeavor to keep control of himself.

"I think now," said Kate, "that he had no more idea that I was in the same city with him than I had that he was there, but I did not stop to consider about anything. I saw that you knew him, my first impression that you two were connected was right, James had not seen me, and my one desire was to flee. I never should have had courage to write to you, except that I could not endure it—to treat you so after your kindness, and after you had shown me that—that you believed in me——"

"Believed in you!" Horton burst out at last. "Kate!—I cannot talk to you of what you have told me!—That hound! The damned scoundrel—for he

has been that all his life—a Payne, and a thing like that! Murder is nothing to that! . . . By the God above, I'll shoot him down like a dog——" he had sprung to his feet, pallid with rage, and walked up and down before her. "I have sat still and listened as long as I can, and I understand now—that jail-bird! It has always been money, money,—it has always been what he has sneaked for, and forged for,—and murdered for, too, for all I know. Oh, Kate, you poor child——!" His voice broke, and he caught his lip between his teeth. "I'll kill him," he said, thickly. "I'll do that *very thing.*" Kate had come to his side, but he turned his convulsed face from her. She was horrified at the concentrated fury of his utterance.

"Horton," she begged, "listen to me please!—How would it help me if you hurt him?" She clasped his arm with trembling hands and turned him toward her a little, putting her hands then on his shoulders. "Listen to me, dear. If you want to add the last straw to my burden, you will do a thing like that. You would ruin yourself, and me, and Paquita,"—the tears gathered in her eyes and rolled down her cheeks—"I have borne about all I can—but—but that would be——" she choked, her voice lost.

Horton looked down at her, the bluish-white lines about his mouth relaxing, and he put his hands over hers, holding them pressed to his breast. "Don't,

Kate," he said, brokenly. "I was beside myself with rage. Forget what I said—I would do nothing of the sort—when I came to consider. I should see what folly it would be.—See, I am in my right mind again."

"But you will forget again," Kate said, shaking from head to foot. "You mean to see him, and will——"

"No, I will not," said Horton. "I could not help it—for the moment——" He drew a deep breath, holding her hands tightly. "Come and sit down, dear, and don't be so frightened. You have a lot to tell me yet, and I shall not lose control of myself again. I told you that I had the means to make him let you alone, and I have. You shall not see him again, but I promise I shall not use violence to him."

"You will forget," Kate said.

"I promise you solemnly I shall not, and you must believe me, Kate." He spoke emphatically in his endeavor to lessen her distress. "Come and sit down. I want to know more about Paquita—it was she you saw at the Summit Hill house, and you mean that your child was living?"

"Yes. It was not true, what they told me," said Kate. "It was he who told them so. All those years I had believed it, and watched other mothers with their children, and been hungry for a child to love, and felt that I would never have that happiness." Her voice quivered with passionate feeling. "It was the

worst thing he did to me—to steal my child, and put her among such surroundings. It will take years to teach her to forget what she has learned; just as my young girlhood has colored all my life, so hers will affect hers, and I am almost powerless." She sat upright, white now in her turn with passion, her eyes showing again that curious contraction of the pupil that made them pale. Horton remembered it well. He had seen the same light in the eyes of an enraged lioness, and in spite of his compassion he felt a certain awe of her. "I shall struggle for her welfare, and fight to help her as long as I have breath left—to bring a child into the world and then leave its soul to be dwarfed and neglected—just left ignorant of the meaning of truth! That is the worst sin of all——" She stopped, gasping, and covered her eyes with her hand. "Oh, and I begged you a minute ago not to be angry!" she said, bitterly. "And I have been ill with rage every day during these last weeks—ever since I knew I had a child." She tried to speak more calmly. "I saw Paquita first in that ruined garden, and her face was James's—or yours. My heart stopped beating at the thought that came to me. It was a sudden doubt of something, an impression left upon my mind by a dream; all at once it seemed to me that I had always doubted. I asked her her name, and I remembered you, and I felt cold with disappointment. She told me about the place

and her relationship, but that moment's doubt, and the flash of certainty that followed it, had burned itself on my mind. I hurried back here to ask you about your family and Paquita. I knew you would come that afternoon, and if you had not I should have sent for you. Paquita had spoken of James Payne as being her guardian. I was puzzled, suspicious, and terribly excited; things began to shape themselves in my mind. You knew nothing of Paquita, but you told me about yourself and James, and it all came to me—the tangle was smoothed out. I went down to Los Angeles, and went first to the old house. The old woman told me that Paquita had gone away 'for good,' and I was more and more excited—I thought that James himself might be there in the city and have suspected, and taken her away. I tried to find out about him, and discovered at once that he had lived in Los Angeles over two years; that the big real estate office with all its placards, and the liveried usher at the door, was owned and managed by him. You know it—The Alvareta Land Company? It looks very prosperous."

"Yes," said Horton, "I know. I have been near enough to watch James's career; it is his latest scheme, more reputable, apparently, than most."

"I found at The Sisters' that Paquita had been brought to them when she was a few months' old by the old Mexican woman, Anita, and a man who said

he was a relative of the child's, a Mr. James Payne, and she was baptized there as Frances Payne. They said that she was a relation of the Paynes of Summit Hill, and that James Payne was her guardian. A few months later James took her away, and four years later he brought her back to them, and she was there most of the time until she went to St. Mary's. I sent a competent man to New Orleans, and he was fortunate in finding the creole woman. He discovered that James had left her house immediately after I was taken to the hospital, and had taken my child with him. He could not find where they had gone, or anything else about them. There was no record of a death at that period that would apply.

"I had come back here then and was waiting for that man's report in a state of mind I cannot describe. You left, and, in a day or two Aunt Silence went, and I walked the floor for two days, I think, for there was no one to watch me. I received the report from New Orleans in the morning, and was trying to think what was best to do next, when James came here to see me." Kate spoke a little breathlessly. "I don't know how to tell you about that interview—I had not seen him for all those years, but I felt paralyzed by him, just as I used to be; only the thought of what I had at stake kept me up. He spoke as calmly as if we had met yesterday. He was smiling and polite while he threatened, but he knew I had found

my child and that I would pay high for her. It was for that he came. It was the substance of our interview; he wanted money, all he could get from me, and I wanted my child, and at the earliest opportunity. I think he took her away from me when he did, either with the expectation of getting something from her English relatives or of searching me out later on, and extorting money from me—oh, that man!" Kate shuddered, violently.

"He said one thing that frightened me more than any other threat he made. 'You forget Paquita's possible attitude in this matter,' he said. 'I have some fourteen years the advantage of you in her affections, and I may have some influence with her. I need money, yes, I need it particularly, and after all I should be glad to have Paquita provided with a home such as you will give her, but she will have views of her own—if I suggest them to her,' and he laughed when he said it. 'What you want is for Paquita to love you. If she comes to you in the right spirit you will find it easy to teach her to care for you; if not, you have a serious difficulty on your hands. You are no more eager for publicity than I am, and it would be a terrible thing for Paquita. If you will assist me financially I will see Paquita and prepare her for seeing you. I know that she has always suspected me of being her father, but she knows nothing at all about her mother, and you will have to tell her

your own story—that is your right anyway, and I have no intention of interfering with it, even if it gives her a poor opinion of her father. I only promise that Paquita will receive you in the right frame of mind, and I think be only too glad to come to you. I suggest that you take her quietly, and in a way that will avoid comment. If you legally adopt her, you do nothing unusual, and I am sure that under all the circumstances Paquita will see the sense of it. That she is really your daughter is your own affair and Paquita's, and concerns nobody else. You are not called upon to make explanations to the world.'

"He is very clever, Horton," Kate said, her lips trembling. "The threat that Paquita would turn from me, and refuse to come with me—that he would turn her against me—made me docile. I agreed to meet him in Los Angeles, and go with him to Paquita. She was not at the old house, she was at a hotel. She received me quietly, even affectionately, and James left us together. I could not say much; it was too wonderful to me that she really belonged to me; I had been lonely so long.—I—I brought her back with me, and she has always been just the same to me—quiet and sweet in her manner, and anxious to fit herself to her surroundings. She has adapted herself so quickly, but—but I wish I understood her better—there is all the future—perhaps in time I can feel that she really loves me——" Kate could not go on.

"Is it that has made you so wretched during these last weeks, Kate?"

"No," she said, "no, that is only a part of it. I gave him money and he promised not to trouble me again, or try to see Paquita, but he has been here more than once. He says that he is frantic about his business, that he has been carrying it on by raising money in any way he could. Of course his methods are criminal, they always are. He has done such things as taking money, giving in return mortgages on property that either did not exist, or to which he had no claim whatever. He has chosen for his victims people who are ignorant, or women who are helpless, but the end is sure to come. He wanted me to understand that he might be taken into custody at any time, and his whole history made public, and of course my connection with him also. He has kept me in a fever of anxiety, and I have given him more money—I had to have time to consider, to think what was best to do for Paquita." She stopped.

"Is that all, Kate?"

Kate flushed scarlet. "No," she said. "He came the other day with another plan. . . . He wished me to marry him; it would be best for Paquita, it would be best for him, it would be best for me." The fire of scorn flamed in Kate's eyes. "Any outcast, however low, can come to me for money—but not for that! I ordered him from my house as I would a

dog, and I wrote to you—I had reached the limit of my endurance——" She paused again, breathing quickly.

Horton's face was blazing. "I expected to hear this—this last effort. Is that all?" he inquired.

"Yes," she said.

Horton sat thinking, his eyes on the water. Twilight had gathered and the tide had crept so high that each wave splashed the edge of the rock, and sent a shower of spray to their feet. The color faded slowly from his face, and in the half light he appeared lined and gray. He turned at last and looked at her. "Kate," he said, "in these last years of loneliness, and longing for happiness, you took into your heart a man whom you could assist—on whom you could lavish some of that interest you would have given a child. It began that way, and it ended in your loving him. If James and all that goes with him are wiped out of your path, and you can have your daughter to love, would you marry him?"

"No," said Kate, firmly.

"Why not?" he asked.

"Because I will not go to a man with an apology on my lips—an apology for myself and my child."

"That is merely your view of it—it would not be his."

"It is mine—that is enough." Her manner was final. She looked up at him, meeting his eyes fairly.

Horton drew a sharp breath. "I knew you would say that!" he exclaimed, as if to himself. He was silent again for a moment, and then turned and put the shawl about her. "Are you chilly, dear?" he asked.

"No, but we must go up before the tide is higher."

"And I must go back to the hotel. I shall take the night train to Los Angeles."

"And, Horton, you can do what you said—actually——?" Her air was timid and appealing.

"Yes, dear."

She sighed and sat up, clasping her hands in her lap. "I shall be almost as happy as when I was a little girl," she said, in a whisper. "I cannot believe it!"

He looked at her, his lips trembling slightly. "Back there at Eisenach?" he asked, half seriously. "What was your real name, Kate? I decided long ago that the name I overheard you give on the train might not be yours."

"It was not my name," Kate said. "I was in such a state of fear that I dreaded to say my name aloud. I gave the first name that occurred to me—on the impulse of the moment. When my uncle offered to let me call myself Talworth I was glad, for it made it harder for James to find me. I think it was partly my uncle's object to save me possible future annoyance, and also he hated my mother's English marriage. My father's name was Ashburton."

"Ashburton!" Horton said, and then he repeated the name again slowly, staring at Kate, "Ashburton——" He took his arm from the back of the bench and sat up straight. "It is an unusual name," he remarked, and sat motionless. Kate looked at him in some surprise, but she could make nothing of his expression. He sighed when he finally turned to her. "I was wondering if I might ask you a question," he said. "If instead of being in the position in which you choose to consider yourself, Kate, you were as free to marry as others about you, would you marry Richard Allison then?"

There was silence. Then Kate said in a low voice, "You must know—why do you ask me?"

"Because I love you I suppose," he said, a little unsteadily. He rose abruptly, standing very straight. "I must go or I will miss my train. See the water is fairly on us," for a larger wave than usual had dashed them with spray. Kate rose also and stood beside him.

"We must go along this steep place behind us; it will bring us to the path." Her voice was low and troubled.

Horton looked at her. "Are you angry with me for asking that?"

"You do everything for me, and I—I—only hurt you," she said, in distress.

"Do you, Kate, . . . then will you have patience with me if I ask you something more?—Is the sight

of me still painful—do I still remind you of James so strongly that you wish me away? Your answer means a great deal to me, but I want you to answer truthfully."

"No, *no!*" Kate exclaimed. "It is gone, that feeling. You must know that I never could have talked to you—told you what I have to-day, if I did not trust you. I have been wretched—almost beside myself during these weeks, but in spite of that I thought of you—unconsciously. To me you are nobody but yourself—there is nothing in you like that man——" She paused, breathless in her earnestness.

"I have won a great deal," Horton said, his voice grown firmer, "and it should be enough—but, Kate, would you make me happy then—just for once—not if you would rather not—but,—would you kiss me, Kate,—before I go?"

She looked up at him, hesitating for a moment, then came closer and reaching up put her arms about his neck, her lips just touching his cheek. He turned his head a little, and kissed her gently, then more lingeringly, his arms about her. Then he let her go. "Thank you, dear," he said, very low.

They turned and climbed up the steep path between the eucalyptus in silence, and reaching the bank above, passed round the house to the driveway. Horton untied his horse, then paused a moment. "I shall

write to you, Kate, to-morrow, or next day. You will promise me to sleep to-night?"

"Yes," she replied.

"That's right," he said, as he mounted. "I shall have to ride fast now." He wheeled his horse, and Kate stood a long time listening to the beat of his horse's hoofs, for he was going at a steady gallop.

XII.

MY BROTHER'S KEEPER

It was not until two days later, and toward the latter part of the afternoon, that Horton was able finally to turn in the direction of his objective point. They had been two intensely disagreeable days. He had risen early, and retired late, busying himself over matters that filled him with disgust. He had had no time to yield to depression; that hung in the background. His last move had been to visit the Summit Hill house, seeking an interview with the wild-eyed woman in her invalid chair. From old Anita he had learned a little, and only one fact of importance from Inez. She had been loyal to the man she had served so long.

Horton found himself elbowed by the usual afternoon crowd. The men of early office hours were already on the sidewalk, hurrying to transact a last bit of business, or seeking their automobiles. The crowd of women who took advantage of the cooler hours for shopping and the rouge-tinted who came for their late afternoon parade, jostled each other before the store windows. The theatres were emptying the matinée-goers into the already crowded streets, and the dozens of automobiles threaded their way slowly along, turning into side streets that would give

them a chance for better speed. They carried double-chinned men and women who looked replete with rapidly acquired prosperity, offering a tempting example to the chasers of the dollar mark on the sidewalk. There was hurry and bustle without geniality or laughter, a collection of units, strangers to each other in most part, but bound together by the compelling chain of possibilities. A town of possibilities sprung by bounds into a city of greater potentiality; a combination of crudities, sunned into virile life by a sky of infinite blue, swept clean by the sweet, dry breath of the desert, or touched in turn by the foggy fingers of the ocean, but possessing in full the essential power of crudity; a marvel of the present, a still greater marvel of the future.

As Horton pushed his way impatiently along, his rasped nerves were only capable of sensing the painful glare of the late afternoon sun that brought into relief the character of the crowd surging about him; a dead level of commonness too dull for humor. He felt incapable of lifting his eyes to the limitless blue above him, or even of seeking between the rows of white buildings for glimpses of the marvellous misty mauve of the distant mountains. He turned into the entrance of a stone-fronted building the entire first floor of which was occupied by the roller-topped desks and leather-covered chairs and couches of the Alvareta Land and Investment Co. The huge plate-glass

window displayed framed maps of new tracts, outlined and tinted to catch the eye, flanked by photographs of gorgeous homes to be had at five figures, as well as modest bungalows procurable for next to nothing. It is natural for man to desire a home—behold it was offered him in every and any form. It is also natural for him to desire as high a rate of interest as possible on his investment; that also was within his easy reach.

A six-foot usher, resplendent in blue cloth and gilt buttons, guarded the entrance, and piloted the unwary investment seeker into troubled waters. Horton strode past the imposing figure, making his way to the nearest roller-topped desk. A dapper, black-haired young man of pronouncedly aquiline features and caressing manner rose to meet him. "What can I do for you, sir?" he asked.

Horton smiled slightly. "Where can I find Mr. Payne?" he answered.

"He is in his private office," said the young man. "I'll see if he is disengaged."

"Don't trouble," said Horton. "I am expected, or ought to be—point out his door to me."

The young man indicated a door at the quietest end of the room, and started to lead the way, but Horton stopped him with an impatient gesture. "I can find my own way," he said, shortly, and he went on down the long room to the door marked private. It was half open, and Horton stood on the threshold

looking in. James Payne was seated giving orders to the two young sub-agents that stood at his desk. His clear-toned, incisive words came distinctly to Horton's ears. "Promise every man that comes that if he buys a lot he can have a steady job on the tract. Get his contract signed up and the money for his first instalment—the more you can squeeze out of him the better—and see that he has something to do, on the grading, or anything else, for a day or two. Then let him go to the devil—you'll want his place for the next man that comes along. You'll get your commission, and we'll get ours—that's all we want I guess. If he's got some money he'll go on paying, and if he hasn't, why he'll lose his contract—he's the only one out anyway."

The young men passed Horton, laughing, and he stepped into the room, closing the door behind him. He stood leaning against it, his hat in one hand, his other hand in his coat pocket. The telephone had rung sharply, and James Payne raised it. "No, Madame," he said in his pleasant, candid voice, that bore the courteous inflection of a gentleman; "Mr. Payne has not returned yet. We expect him to-morrow—or the day after at latest. . . . Oh, no, I should not worry about it—he gave you a receipt did he not? Well then it is all right. He will have the paper for you. . . . Yes, Madame, of course, but Mr. Payne is very careful about such things. You

would better come in to-morrow, and he will have it for you——" He hung up the receiver. "The devil he will!" he said, and turning in his chair he rose, and looked into Horton's eyes. A quiver passed over his face, like a ripple over smooth water, and on the second his hand was beneath his coat, but Horton was too quick for him. "Better let it be," he said, quietly. They stood looking into each other's eyes, then Horton said in the same tone, "I want a word or two with you, that's all—just show your hands. I don't want to hold this thing all day."

James Payne had not taken his eyes from Horton's, but he brought his hand back to the front of his waistcoat, and Horton moved aside from the door. "I have set the latch," he remarked. "We will not be disturbed. Suppose you sit down—I will sit on the desk."

James shrugged slightly, and sat down, and Horton threw one leg across the corner of the desk, one hand pressing his knee, the other resting on the desk close to his pocket. James bent forward and took up a half sheet of paper that lay on his desk, and he folded and unfolded it, bending and twisting it in unsteady hands, as he talked. His face was expressionless except for the blood that had risen to his cheeks. Like Horton he was fair-skinned, and like him he flushed and paled as easily as a woman—much more so than most. His hair was darker, and well

touched with gray, while Horton's was still as yellow as a boy's, and his eyes narrowed more readily, but on the whole the likeness between them was marked. It lay in the shape and carriage of the head, a certain distinction of bearing. There was the same dark blue eye, and general contour of brow and chin. James was the better looking man, for he lacked Horton's massive jaw, and his features were more regular. There was more grace, and less strength in the lines of his body, and he was not quite so tall or so broad-shouldered as his step-brother.

He looked up now into Horton's face, his eyes narrowed into mere slits, his mouth smiling slightly. "Well," he said, "and to what am I indebted for this honor?"

Horton did not answer him at once. He had not been face to face with James Payne for several years, and he studied him thoughtfully. He felt a certain surprise at his appearance. The evil story to which he had listened two evenings before appeared unreal, abnormal, in the presence of this man of gentlemanly aspect and bearing. Horton experienced the same sense of shocked disgust, a recoil from the unnatural, that he recognized as his attitude in former years. It touched the surface of his cold anger, and prompted his remark.

"And you are actually a Payne?" he said.

James's eyes widened, slightly, and he laughed

his soft laugh. "Why, yes," he said; "that was a matter in which I was not consulted. I simply couldn't help it. But why that remark?"

"Only that it struck me for a moment that it was a great pity about you."

"Is that what you came here to say?" James's brows lifted.

"No," said Horton. "I have just come from the Summit Hill house. I found it occupied by friends of yours."

"Well—they don't do you any harm," James said. "The old woman's nothing but a poor old Mexican, and glad to take a lodger who will pay her a trifle for a rotten room or two. That paralyzed woman can't hurt anybody." His look was guarded, and slightly puzzled, but there was an edge to his words that Horton understood.

"No, she's harmless now," he replied, "and because she is the wretched suffering creature she is, I will tell you that she is loyal to you. You need not vent your anger on her, for she told me very little, and only one thing that I did not know already. She only informed me of her relations to you when I told her of your most recent proposal to Miss Talworth—she was too much of a woman to keep quiet then."

"Ah—" said James, very slowly. He controlled his features well, his eyes still steady in their gaze, but Horton knew the army of thoughts that his nimble

brain was marshalling and adjusting to meet the unexpected. It aroused a faint sense of amusement in Horton, who knew the inevitable result of their interview, but it appeared an unnecessary waste of energy as well, and he lifted his shoulders impatiently, drawing a paper from his pocket.

"Read that," he said, shortly, handing it to James. "If I were a little more like you, I suppose I would sit here another half hour laughing inwardly at your mental gymnastics, but the sooner we conclude this thing the better."

James took the paper and read it through slowly and carefully, and then sat looking down at it still, the blood rising hot to his face. "The dates are correct," Horton remarked, dryly. "I thought you might grasp them better if they were written. I do not need your corroboration of them. Miss Talworth is as free as air, and there is no more for you in that direction. I have spoiled as damnable a piece of rascality as ever a degenerate mind invented, only I should have come on the scene a little earlier."

There was silence for a time and then James looked up. "Well?" he said. The word was softly spoken, but it was vibrant with passion, and he smiled.

The bluish lines appeared about Horton's lips. "I seem to have a faculty for thwarting you, you mean to say." He bent forward slightly, smiling at the other; they looked wonderfully alike for the

moment. Then Horton's expression changed, and he lifted himself abruptly. "James," he said, "I have had an entire contempt, and I thought a thorough understanding of you for a very long time, but I think now I really never grasped the right explanation of you. I told you several years ago when you forged my name for the second time, that if ever again a criminality of yours crossed my path, I would send you to the penitentiary without a qualm." Horton's voice deepened. "The other evening when I learned what you had done to a helpless girl—*you thing* too vile to breathe, and a decent name tacked to you!—I could have shot you with less compunction than I would a mangy dog. But I have had two days and nights in which to consider you, and I have reached a different view of you. I think you are insane—quite as much so as any raving maniac who wears a straight-jacket—only your illness of mind has taken a different direction. I brought this with me, and showed it promptly, because it is impossible to calculate what effect sudden fear may have upon an unbalanced mind, and I had another's interests to consider. You would have shot me dead, there by the door, before you knew what you were doing—if I had not covered you. You are just as great a menace to the welfare of those about you as any other irresponsible and I propose that you shall be well guarded for the rest of your days. I never before gave any

thought to the education of criminals, or the skilful treatment of the mentally perverted, but I confess a curiosity as to the result of the treatment I propose for you. I have decided to make you an offer—I prefer to put it in the form of an offer rather than a command—which will, I think, commend itself to your shrewdness.

"I propose that by this time to-morrow you shall be on your way out of this country—by that I mean this continent—and you will go escorted. I have in mind a place where the laws are quite as well enforced as they are here, and there is an American consul who bestirs himself promptly. I am thinking of Melbourne. It is a fairly pleasant place in which to live, and if I remember rightly as a boy you were wild to go to Australia. I will be responsible for the expenses of your journey, and on the middle and the last day of each week after you arrival you will receive the sum of one hundred dollars as your regular income. These payments will be subject to several conditions. You must appear in person to receive them—the money will be paid only into your own hand. If you fail to appear *once* the payments cease. Any irregularities of conduct that would subject you to the laws of the country will also put an end to our agreement. The only things asked of you are that you will be a law-abiding citizen, and have a per-

manent place of residence—otherwise you will be perfectly free." Horton stopped.

"Well, I'll be eternally damned!" James exclaimed, staring at Horton in utter amazement. Then he added half aloud, "So I am mentally perverted am I?" He pondered over his last remark thoughtfully before he said with a return of his usual manner, "You mean that you are going to pay me two hundred dollars a week to keep me out of the country, and on my good behavior."

"I expected you to take that view of it."

"And you mean what you say, and will give me a guarantee that your proposition is straight?"

"I should not expect *you* to take the mere word of any man," Horton replied.

James studied his brother's clear eye in silence, then he said, "Suppose I choose to stay?"

"That is for you to say," Horton replied. "To a certain extent I am indifferent. I would prefer that you close with my offer, for I still have a family pride that dislikes to see my name disgraced. But it will not stand in the way of my putting you where you are harmless—not for a moment—that I have decided on as imperative."

"And Miss Talworth——?" James spoke with a watchful eye on Horton's set face, but the smiling malice that was the quality always least under his control, had refused to be ignored.

The blood burned in Horton's face, and he clenched and unclenched the hand on his knee, but he succeeded in answering calmly the man who shrank a little under his flaming glance. "Suppose you keep to the matter in hand," he said. "I have made you an offer—take it, or leave it."

"I take it—of course," James said, without hesitation. "But how about all this?" He waved his hand to indicate his surroundings. "You say I am to journey away by noon to-morrow."

"It will be left in the hands of some one who is competent to close things up. You have kept yourself extraordinarily free of real estate—it's a hindrance when one is given to sudden changes of residence. I have looked up your creditors, and from the number of them I judge that you were intending very shortly to leave them agape. I have made a list of the most clamorous, and you will leave enough behind you to settle your debts—it is not such a large sum that you cannot spare it out of the amount you proposed to carry away with you."

James flushed angrily, but he only asked, "And Inez?"

"She has asked to be allowed to stay where she is," Horton said. "I offered her a room and care at a hospital if she would take it, but she begged to be left where she was. I shall see that she has enough for her needs—she will not want anything long."

James made no comment, but a faint pucker appeared on his usually smooth forehead; then he shrugged his shoulders. "And Paquita will, I suppose, be idolized by her fond mother! What a perfect apportionment for everybody!" The irrepressible gleam appeared in the depths of his eyes. "Give me time and I may even become a model character."

"We shall see," Horton replied, imperturbably. "I propose that you shall have your chance. We will try the effect of a comfortable income upon you. The possession of ample means of support without the necessity of scheming, and lying, and stealing for it will be a new experience to you. It will be interesting to see how you deport yourself under such unusual circumstances." Horton lifted himself, and stood up. "As we have reached a conclusion, and I have plenty to do before to-morrow, I will go."

"But I don't know any particulars," James objected. "When am I going to see you again?"

"At half-past eight, here, to-morrow morning," Horton said, as he turned to the door. "You come prepared to pay your bills, and I shall be ready to disabuse your mind of any doubts as to the sincerity of my intentions."

"Wait a minute!" James said, whirling round in his chair. "You said I was to be 'escorted' on my journey—who is my escort to be?"

"Myself," Horton replied.

"*You!*" James ejaculated, his heavy jaw dropping; then he recovered himself in a laugh. "Suppose I give you the slip between this and then."

"I have provided against that," Horton answered, as the door closed on him, "both for the present and the future."

XIII.

THE WINDOW OF HOPE

"I SUPPOSE," said Aunt Silence, "as I am fifty-five, and you, Paquita, are so extremely young, we have to resign ourselves to being neglected. Wasn't there a single thing for me—not even an advertisement?"

"No," said Paquita, "nothing at all." She had just come out of the dingy little post-office to the big touring-car in which Mrs. Silence and Kate were seated, and as she leaned over to hand Kate a bulky letter, she looked up into Mrs. Silence's face of mock annoyance with shining eyes. They had taken their usual afternoon ride along the coast road, turning inland to skirt Peek's Point, and had come back to the two miles of paved boulevard that joined Moneta Valley and the town. The sun was bright, and the breeze cool and sweet, bearing the faint salty tang of the ocean, but Paquita had sat silent and sleepy-eyed, oblivious to its enlivening touch, apparently not even listening to Mrs. Silence's and Kate's conversation. Kate looked better than she had for days. Their rapid ride through the sun and the wind had brought a pink flush to her cheeks, and her eyes were very soft as they rested on Paquita. The girl lacked her vivid

color—a touch of pallor that made her appear dusky. It seemed to Mrs. Silence that she grew more quiet and sleepy-eyed with every day that passed. The girl puzzled her; it was so rarely that she showed the slightest animation.

The letter that she had handed to Kate brought a deeper flush to Kate's cheeks, and she held it clasped closely in her hands as they turned toward home. Paquita herself seemed to have received a vivifying touch in the dirty little post-office. Her great eyes were wide, the color aflame in her cheeks. She looked up to the mountains that showed a jagged line of darker blue against the azure of the sky, and then out over the undulating world of water. They had left the ill-paved and unattractive main street of the town, and turned into a side street that brought them out to the boulevard again. They were close to the slope of beach, and the gentle swell and backward flow of the ocean. At the water-line a flock of tiny sandpipers ran backward and forward, following each receding wave in quest of their prey, and further out several pelicans floated lazily on the breeze, pausing at intervals to drop through space, a headlong plunge into the trough of a wave.

"How beautiful it is!" said Paquita, softly.

Aunt Silence looked at her in surprise, and Kate smiled happily. "It is just what I was thinking," Kate said. "Paquita, to-morrow is the Fourth, and

there will be a dance in the evening—would you like to go?"

"Oh, yes!" said the girl. "I haven't danced for ever so long. I could dance all night." The hand against her breast tightened on the letter beneath it. She had only seen and recognized the writing, and thrust it into the bosom of her dress; it lay with one sharp corner pricking her warm skin. When they reached home she would fly to her room. She saw the patch of sunshine on the floor; she would sit in it and be happy.

Aunt Silence had made a pretty accurate guess as to the authorship of Kate's letter, but she lacked the key to Paquita's look of joy. Horton's visit had brought an aspect of relief to Kate's worn face, and Mrs. Silence had spent two days of intense satisfaction. The troubled lift of brow was gone, and the usual upward twitch had returned to her mouth.

"I am glad you are going to spend the Fourth like a Christian, Kate," she remarked.

"That depends on the point of view," said Kate, smiling at her.

"I suppose," said Mrs. Silence, with disapproval, "that you would rather collect a dozen children and retire to the barnyard, with your hands to your ears, as you did the last Fourth of July."

"But you enjoyed it, Aunt Silence," Kate pro-

tested. "You know you did until the chamois swallowed the package of fire-crackers."

"It was a dreadful experience," said Aunt Silence, severely. "It is a wonder it didn't kill him." Kate laughed, and Underwood, their sedate English chauffeur turned an attentive ear. He took a deep interest in Mrs. Silence's menagerie, as did every servant on the place.

"Hand did nothing 'appen to 'im, may I ask, mum?" he inquired.

"I was anxious enough, Underwood, I assure you," Aunt Silence said, "until it occurred to me that powder won't explode if it is damp. It was a great relief to me when I thought of that."

"Yes, mum, indeed, but it wouldn't have occurred to me, mum," Underwood declared, gravely.

"The goats are interesting," Mrs. Silence continued, "but I don't know on the whole that I am not tired of them. Mrs. Herst-Hall has three new cats for her cattery and she says they are positively fascinating. She wants me to come and see them."

"Oh, dear!" said Kate. "I know the symptoms! You would better be careful, Aunt Silence, they would eat up all your little Muscovies."

"Mira Herst-Hall says her cattery is very expensive, the cats cost so much when they have to be brought from abroad; that is a serious consideration with me," Aunt Silence declared.

"They're dangerous things, mum, in my opinion," Underwood ventured, respectfully. "One of the nasty beasts scratched Mrs. Herst-'all's face something frightful, they say, mum. She 'ad to stay away from Mrs. Peek's dinner last night."

"Did the Peeks give a dinner last night?" Aunt Silence inquired, with interest.

"It was an hinformal dinner I 'eard them say last night at the Club, mum, and afterwards they all come over to the Club to dance. I 'ad stepped over for a word with Mr. Herst-'all's chauffeur, and they were dancing very gay, and the gentlemen talking at the bar. Mr. Herst-'all 'e starts the bet, mum, that 'e could cross a Muscovy duck hand a gray goose, and the result would be more a gosling than a duckling, mum, and the rest took it up, and the bets run high on whether it would honk like a goose, or quack like a duck."

"What nonsense!" Aunt Silence exclaimed. "It isn't possible!"

"Nonsense I should say, mum! But Mr. Herst-'all 'e swore 'e could do it, and they all took sides, though I will say, mum," Underwood continued, lowering his voice for Aunt Silence's ear, "they 'ardly knew just what they was about, what with the hinformal dinner and the rest, and as for Mr. Herst-'all, mum, and Mr. Litton, they did be'ave something 'orrible."

Aunt Silence shook her head disapprovingly over most of Underwood's narrative, but her undertakings in the stable-yard were of genuine interest to her. "Do you think, Underwood, that Herst-Hall can do what he said?" she inquired.

"Hindeed no, mum," Underwood assured her. "I think there's nothing to it, mum. I never 'eard of such a thing."

"I intend to find out," Aunt Silence said, firmly. They had turned into their own driveway, and Paquita was out of the machine before it had fairly stopped. Kate followed more deliberately, but Aunt Silence remained seated. "I think I shall go on to the Herst-Hall's," she said.

"I judged that you would from what I overheard of your conversation," Kate replied, much amused. "But don't become converted to the cats, dear, please."

"We shall see," was Aunt Silence's non-committal answer.

Kate had gone down to the rock on the beach, for it seemed the fitting place to read Horton's letter. She felt an absolute certainty that it would bring her only comfort; the quiet strength of his assurance had entered into her. She had hugged it to her in the night, and carried it about with her in the day. She had only asked that she might have her child, and that

they might dwell together in peace; any other desire, however vague or unconsciously longed for she had endeavored to set aside; she had no place for dreams in the future before her. She could not put into words the gratitude she felt to the man who had come to her assistance; the hot tears had risen in her eyes when she thought of her utter inability of expression. From the very beginning it was he who had given, who had expended himself upon her, and she had received it all; there was no return she could make.

She opened his letter and held the closely written sheets tightly, for the ocean breeze stirred and fluttered them in her hands. She read quickly, her head bent, but before she reached the second page she stopped and closed her eyes, grown white to her lips, swaying a little as she sat. Her gaze went out mechanically to the water that glistened and heaved under the glare of white light that dazed her, and made her clutch the bench on which she sat for support. She sat gasping and shaking, too stunned even for understanding. Then it came over her gradually, the joy and the realization of what his words meant, and she buried her face in the rustling papers on her knee. "Ah, my God, my God!" she whispered. "Thou hast *not* forsaken me!" The rising tears choked her, and it was a long time before she could see to go on, but as she read the sobs caught her breath, and she stopped to wipe the tears away. She

finished to the last word and sat with a full heart. It seemed to her that each word was engraved on her memory, still she must go back to them and read them again and again.

"Dear Kate," Horton wrote, "it is very late, but I can think of nothing but you, and I want this to reach you at the earliest moment. The years have been long to you, dear, and you have been very patient, but you can lay aside the burden you have carried, and come into your own—I know no one who deserves happiness more than you.

"I have delayed until to-night, for I wanted to be certain of several things before I wrote. I have seen the woman at the Summit Hill house, and the old Mexican, Anita, and this afternoon I saw James. I will write you what I have discovered in the fewest words I can, the facts speak for themselves. On the fifteenth day of April, 1889, James Selwyn Payne married in the City of Mexico, a Spanish girl, Julietta Overa. She had a sister, Inez, and this Inez is the wretched woman who has been for the last three years at the house on Summit Hill. She has spinal trouble and will not live long. I think she has suffered terribly—a sort of dying by inches. She has been a bad woman, an able second to James in his various undertakings and his companion for years. Just when or under what circumstances the connection began I do not know, but it is certain that a short time

after James left New Orleans and came to Los Angeles, they were together. Two months later when he went to British Columbia she went with him, and it was then that they took your child from The Sisters'. Four years afterwards James brought the little girl back and placed her again at The Sisters', then later, when Inez's illness had made her helpless, he sent her to the Summit Hill house; it was a cheap way of providing for Inez as well as Paquita. It is hard to judge of such a woman as Inez Overa, or to say just what name should be given to an attachment such as hers, but there is no doubt that through all these years, and under every vicissitude she has clung devotedly to him. I think also that of all the women James has known, she is the only one to whom he has shown any real attachment and consequently it is characteristic of him that he never married her. His marriages were prompted by self-interest alone, the emanations of his restless, plotting brain.

"I must go back to my starting point; as I said, in the spring of 1889 James married Julietta Overa, and three years later, on the tenth of March, 1892, she died. In August of the same year you and he were married in Philadelphia. He married you under the name of James Selwyn, but it affects the legality of the marriage not at all. Feeling as you do—do you realize, Kate, what this means to you? I am

grateful that I am permitted to be the first to tell you—but there is more. In 1895, in King County, Washington, James Selwyn obtained a divorce from Katherine Ashburton on the ground of abandonment, stating that he was ignorant of your whereabouts. Kate, you have your child, and you are as free as the laws of this country can make you. James will leave this place and this country—I shall never take my eyes from him again. Let the thought of him pass out of your mind. He is of my blood and of my name; it is my place to watch over him, just as it would be were he insane—it is not out of the bounds of possibility that he is so—the line between insanity and depravity is indistinctly marked, and who is to say where the one ends and the other begins. . . . I shall care for Inez Overa—it will be only a very short time for her.

"I did not know it was in me to say it—you will never know how difficult it has been—but love is spelled in more ways than one, and your happiness has come to be far more to me than any thought of my own. When the man you love comes to you again, don't refuse him. Like me you have lost fifteen years of the essential joy of life, the only happiness that means anything—no, I will modify that, I have learned to do so in these last few days—but still, it is the best part of life, and Kate, *take it* when it comes to you and hold it close.

"Before I stop, I want to make a confession to you—I think that somewhere in me there must be a drop of James Payne's blood. When you told me your name, Ashburton, I knew where I had heard it. I had known the circumstance of the divorce, and had always supposed it was the name of the girl James had married in Mexico. I had heard in the most indefinite way of that marriage, for it was after my mother's death, and I had severed all connection with James. I knew of no other marriage. It was years afterwards that I was called upon to interfere with some plans of his, in a manner that put him at my mercy, and gave me an effective weapon against him, and it was then that he told me of the divorce. He told me that his wife had been a Miss Ashburton, and the name stayed in my memory. As you sat there beside me the thought had grown in me that by serving you I might win from your gratitude what you refused to another; it took hold of me, the possibility —I could not part with hope, Kate. Then you told me your name, and a whole set of circumstances was clear to me; James had merely practised a further deceit upon you. You were as free as air, you could love and marry whom you wished; you would turn to the arms of the man you loved, and the devil rose in me—I could keep you ignorant for a time, and try to win you for myself. It was a thought worthy of James; it took form in my mind—and vanished, in the

space of a few burning moments. I bid you good-by, dear, when I asked you to kiss me. As long as I live I shall remember that last sight and touch of you—it was worth my thirty-eight unsatisfactory years. I am a far better man for having known you, Kate, you have filled my heart and made me indifferent to much that might have tempted me, and with the memory of you that I shall cherish, I shall be able to live out my time. If you ever need me you know how to find me, but I think it would be better for me to step out of your life. I have the strength to write this, but not to see you. Kate, I *beg* you to be happy. That is the greatest joy you can give me now, and the last thing I ask of you. With all my love and a prayer for your welfare,

HORTON PAYNE."

Kate folded the sheets at last, and held them in her lap, her lips trembling, her eyes wide. "'Kate, I beg you to be happy,'" she repeated in a low voice, "'I *beg* you to be happy.'" And he who had done all this for her? It was a very passion of gratitude that swept over her. Her cheeks had burned in the night at the thought of the caress she had so unhesitatingly given him. It was prompted by the ache of pity she had felt—the longing to give just a little happiness when she was forced to withhold so much. She felt glad of her impulse now. The real integrity

of the man, the triumph of his love over passion, touched the innermost cord of sympathy in her. It impressed her so powerfully that for the moment it held in abeyance the consciousness of her own joy. The capacity to expend herself on another, to set aside self, had been fostered in her by those years of loneliness until it had become a vital part of her. She recognized the same quality in Horton with a warm throb of understanding. She had grown to trust him, and her gratitude to him was boundless, but as she pondered his letter she granted to him the highest degree of respect; he had passed at a stride into the innermost place of confidence and esteem.

It was a long moment before she turned to the contemplation of her own happiness. Paquita was her very own, beyond the possibility of interference, the paramount desire of her heart granted. She held the knowledge to her, and dwelt on it, fearful of turning her thoughts from it to that other joy that was beginning to clamor for recognition. Aunt Silence had judged rightly of her when she said that Kate's capacity for maternal tenderness was the real foundation of her love for Allison. He had appealed to her irresistibly. He had struggled out of a hard and unlovely boyhood, grappling bravely with the difficulties that beset him. He had held doggedly to his ambitions and had worked steadily and determinedly in the furtherance of them. No woman had

ever given Allison any sort of understanding sympathy until he met Kate, and he received eagerly and gratefully the interest and sympathy she gave him. His desire for appreciation and protective tenderness appealed powerfully to Kate's unsatisfied motherhood. In the beginning Allison had not demanded more of her than interest, sympathy, and friendship, all of which Kate had given willingly. It had been the one happiness of the last four years, this joy of lavishing upon someone the watchful tenderness that welled up in her. It would have been almost impossible for any man to see Kate frequently and intimately without being strongly attracted, and Allison soon came to demand more of her than mere friendship. She had endeavored to hold him in check, but Allison was not of the type that believes in impossibilities and he had determinedly and constantly pleaded his love and his need of her. Outwardly she had stood firm, but in her innermost consciousness she had yielded to him. In reality she had been struggling for years against a longing for the natural relations of life, the wish for husband and children—the essentials of a home. Allison's forceful and attractive personality, and her firm conviction of his absolute devotion to her, and above all his appeal to the maternal and protective in her, had weakened the pride that shrank from revealing to any one her misfortune, as well as her vivid remembrance of suffering, and the instinctive timidity

and distrust that her bitter experience had bred in her. Kate had gradually come to centre every interest of her life in Allison. She had the faculty of idealizing character that belongs in particular to women in whom the instinct of motherhood is strong, and Kate had woven into her conception of Allison the qualities that she most admired. It was a revival of the ruined dream of her girlhood rather than the unawakened passion of her ripe womanhood.

Horton's advent and the painful recollections it aroused had forced her thoughts back into their old channels, and the intense happiness, and the anxieties of the last few weeks had for the time driven out every other emotion. Her child was given to her, she could love her, care for her—it was the gratification of her innermost desire, the craving that underlay every other emotion, even her love for Allison. Holding close to her this greatest of joys, she turned timidly to consider the other possibility. "Kate, when the man you love comes to you again, don't refuse him—like me you have lost years of the essential joy of life—take it when it comes to you and hold it close." Was it possible that that also was in store for her—that rounding out and completion of her life? The sense of freedom, the possibility of yielding to happiness without questioning and doubt, the desires that she had beaten back and repressed, laid their hold upon her, and she sat for the moment quivering and breathless.

XIV.

MAN PROPOSES

A CHILL breath from the shadow of the bank behind her woke Kate from her long reverie. The sun was sinking into a bank of haze, its dulled light turning the world of water to a milky opal, shot with green. It was evening and she had sat long hours through, unmindful of the immediate present, forgetful of Paquita and the hours she had left her to spend alone.

She caught up the papers in her lap, and hastened up the narrow path behind her. She sought Hop in the kitchen. "Missee Silence, she stay 'way to dinner," Hop announced. "She telephone long time ago." Evidently she had found the Herst-Halls diverting. Hop had not seen Paquita.

Kate went to her own room and put Horton's letter away with a careful hand, then crossing the hall knocked on Paquita's door. There was no answer, so she turned the handle and looked in. The room had been her own, and as it had the best outlook of any in the house, Kate had given it to the girl. It was softly tinted in blue and gold and white, one wide latticed window giving on the ocean, another commanding a magnificent view of the upward slope of valley and the mountains beyond.

On the wide bed Paquita lay prone, dressed just as she had been for their drive, her hat lying beside her. Her face was hidden in the curve of her arm, and against the white counterpane her mass of hair looked very black. There was something in the limpness of her attitude that sent a chill over Kate. "Paquita, are you asleep?" she asked, softly. The girl stirred a little, but did not answer. "You are not ill, are you, dear?" Kate asked, as she bent over her. She felt a sudden sense of fright, she did not know why.

Paquita slowly drew herself up to her elbow, and looked at Kate without speaking. Her eyes were quite dull and almost half closed, her face without a trace of color. "You are ill!" Kate exclaimed, startled by her appearance. "Paquita, dear, what is it—your head?"

"Yes," said Paquita, very low.

"You poor child!" Kate said in quick self-reproach,—"and I left you alone all afternoon. Let me help you take off your dress, dear,—and this tight collar. You would rather go to bed wouldn't you?"

Paquita did not answer, but she raised an aimless hand to the throat of her dress. Kate's fingers were hastened by anxiety, and she quickly loosened the girl's clothes, and brought her nightdress from the closet. When Paquita was ready she crept between the covers and curled up like a sick animal. Kate

smoothed the pillow and bent over her to remove the pins that held her heavy hair, kissing her gently as she did so. "Is your head so very bad? When did you first feel ill, dear?" she asked.

"After the drive," said Paquita, dully.

"What do you think brought it on?"

The girl closed her eyes with a look of suffering, shrinking from the cool hand Kate had laid on her forehead. "I don't know,"—she spoke scarcely above a whisper,—"I was in the sun this morning——"

"I thought you looked pale when we were driving," Kate said. "I will get you some headache powder I have, but I think I would better telephone for the doctor——"

"Oh, no!" Paquita cried, sharply. "I don't want him. If you will bring me the powder I will sleep—if nobody comes to talk to me I will go to sleep—the pain will stop then." There was a note of such intense irritation in her voice that Kate brought her the powder in silence. Paquita took it without saying anything more, but when the elder woman bent to kiss her, she said, "Thank you," in her dull voice.

"If you do not sleep you will call me, won't you?" Kate begged. She felt much as if the girl had thrust her away with an impatient hand, and her heart ached, yet her anxiety would not let her go. "If

you would let me sit here with you I would keep very quiet——" she said, hesitating.

Paquita moved her head restlessly. "It would keep me awake," she said, less irritably, but with a note of insistence. "If you would shut the door—please—when you go."

Kate arranged the windows so as to avoid a draught, and stole softly out of the room. The sunshine of her brilliant day was clouded. The strain of the last weeks, and the sudden relief and vivid joy of the afternoon, followed by this sense of hurt anxiety, was beginning to show itself in a nervous trembling and a desire to weep. Kate fought the weakness bravely; Paquita might be really ill, there was the night before her, and it was no time now to give way. She must wait a little and see whether the girl slept or whether she was as ill as she looked.

She went to the furthest corner of the glazed porch, and shook her head when Hop came to her. "Only a cup of coffee," she said. "I am not coming in; bring it to me here. Miss Paquita is not feeling well, and will not want anything now." As Kate was not Mrs. Silence, Hop obeyed her without comment, but he grunted his disapproval as he removed the fast cooling dinner to the kitchen. He reflected that there had been no real comfort in the house since that quiet, dark-eyed girl had appeared.

It had grown chilly with the coming of evening, and Kate drew her warm shawl closely about her. She would wait half an hour and then see if Paquita slept. She reproached herself for her afternoon's forgetfulness. The dream into which Horton's last words had plunged her appeared unreal enough now. Such a thing might be possible in the future—a long way in the future—but her immediate concern would be to win the love and confidence of her child. The scene of a few moments before brought home to her forcibly how really she and Paquita were strangers. She passed in review all she knew of Paquita's childhood, and the last two or three years of her girlhood, and her mother's heart melted in pity for the girl. How much there would be to undo! What infinite patience, skill, and tenderness would have to be hers! The blood came in her cheeks with the warmer heartbeat of resolve. She had the taint of heredity most probably, certainly the slow but effective influence of early surroundings to eradicate, but difficult as her task appeared she was unafraid; love would conquer. The mere joy of personal gratification sank below her horizon. When she could hold Paquita cheek to cheek, with no shadow between them, then perhaps it would be time for her to seek an added happiness. She rose from her place in the sheltered corner, and walked slowly up and down, the trouble in her face smoothed away. How much, how infin-

itely much she had for which to be grateful! Her afternoon in the ruined garden came back to her; the little brilliantly decorated arbor, and the gay sunlight on the white buildings far beyond the arroyo; the awakened womanhood in Paquita's languorous eyes, and the sharp pain of understanding that had caught her own breath at realization of it. What might not a few more months of neglect and ill surroundings have brought to the girl—and she had been given to her in time!

Kate went softly into the hall and opened Paquita's door with the greatest care. The light in the room was dim, and she came cautiously to the bedside, far enough to see Paquita's features. She lay perfectly still, and her breathing was regular, as one in deep sleep. Kate stole out again with a great sense of relief. She could plan without the sharp edge of anxiety that the fear of illness had given her thoughts. She took up her steady walk, back and forth, on the soft matting of the porch. In the strain of the last weeks she had had no opportunity to plan for Paquita; she had been too much overshadowed by fear and dread, but she could face the future now, unhampered. She would take Paquita away from their present surroundings for a time. She would take her to Los Angeles and give her every advantage that the place afforded. She had learned Paquita's aptitude for music, and even her proficiency in dancing

might be utilized as an added interest. Mrs. Silence's home and her social prestige were at their service. Kate was not alone in judging that their present surroundings offered but little for a young girl. There were too few of her own kind and age, and the social atmosphere was too vitiated for the healthy lungs of youth. Kate had lived in open indifference to it, but her attitude must of necessity change were she chaperoning a girl like Paquita. She considered thoughtfully all the new interests she could bring into Paquita's life, and she was woman of the world enough to know how much she could accomplish for the girl. Freed from annoyance, capable of coming and going at will, backed by social position and wealth, what was there she could not accomplish? Paquita would not be normal if she did not give her affection in return. At this point a thought that had been in the background of her mind presented itself. She would be nearer to Allison, and he would enter in a way into their daily life. He would come naturally to an understanding of Paquita's real relationship to her, and her devotion to her child's interests. There was no reason when the right time came why she should not speak openly to him; she knew that like Horton he must have wondered and tried to explain her to himself. But she would not be hurried into other interests, or unlock her lips until she accomplished her first and greatest desire. Even if he

were beside her now, she would keep silent, though she might not be able to hide from him that her attitude had changed.

She had passed in her slow walk into the sheltered corner again and the smothered roar of the water, and her own movements had deadened the sound of quick steps on the walk below. When she turned a dark figure stood at the top of the steps, and as if in answer to her thoughts a questioning voice said, "Kate?"

She drew a sharp breath of surprise. "Richard—*you!*" she exclaimed.

He came quickly to her. "Did I startle you?" he asked. He took her mechanically outstretched hand and gave it his usual warm pressure. "I got in—back from the East—an hour ago, and I drove right over. I wanted to see you, if only for an hour or two. I have to go early in the morning."

"Have you had dinner?" Kate asked. She was conquering the shock that had sent the blood to her face.

"Yes, on the train. Don't stand, Kate—are you feeling better? Aunt Silence said in her letter that you were not well. I have been worrying over it all the way across the continent." With the quick movements natural to him, he had drawn up a seat, and put a cushion at her back. Close as he was to her, she could not see his face distinctly, but his whole manner

breathed even more than the usual degree of nervous vitality that was one of his distinguishing characteristics.

"I am quite well," said Kate. "Aunt Silence is apt to worry about me without any reason."

"I wish I could see you better," Allison said, as he bent over her. "I should soon know which of you is the most truthful. Kate, I wonder if you have any idea what it is like on the desert just now—and in the East. This coolness is like heaven after it. If I ever lacked in love for my marvellous State, I only needed this last month's experience to shame me. Baltimore, New York, Boston—I spent my time fleeing before a hot wave."

"But it did you good, Richard? You have not had a holiday for a long time."

"I suppose it did," Allison said, with a change in his wonderfully flexible voice. "I had reached a shaky ledge in my mountain climbing, when I must either at once go down, or go up—or so it seemed to me. I needed a moment to get my breath, and think. Kate, you go on your quiet way with your mind already made up—and a steady purpose. I wonder if you know anything about a man's vacillations and where they will lead him?"

"Yes, I think I do," Kate said, "but, Richard, you have less of that quality than most. I have often admired your singleness of purpose. It is not what

one is tempted to do—it is what one does that counts."

He moved restlessly. "Yes," he said, his voice dropping to its deep note, "but one questions one's motives. . . . I have reached a sort of parting in the ways, and I have spent the last weeks in deciding that I am not going to loosen my hold on convictions that have guided me from the beginning. I have aimed for what seemed to me the best—the things most worth having, and I can afford to brush aside a sentimentality, to say nothing of what appeals merely to the least admirable in me. . . . Kate, you are the highest ideal I have ever had—I have always turned to the thought of you as the best thing in my life, and, oh, Kate why won't you listen to me, and come to me? I have sat at your feet so long! There never was a man who needed just your influence more than I do. You know I love you—the only part of me that's worth having loves you—I shall drop to something inadequate without you. You have done so much for me that I can never find words to thank you, and I am begging you again to do the greatest of all things for me——" Kate left her hands in his clasp, but she did not answer. His words had come quickly, easily, the fluent speech of a man who has instant expression at his command. It was a gift that had marked him out in his profession and was as natural as the man himself, as varied as his complex moods, as brilliant as his quickly formed

thoughts, but interwoven with it all was a nervous stress, a certain desperation that was new to Kate. It was as if he were urged by strong necessity, and its appeal to her was powerful, far more so than any other he could have made. Her love was compounded of the very qualities that answered immediately to such an appeal. She clung firmly to her determination of the earlier evening—for she had decided when she was uninfluenced by the emotion that took hold upon her now—but it came to her with a flood of joy that she need not withhold the secret she had guarded so long. Whatever she might have to ask of his patience in the future, she was free now to give him the one great assurance. She held back breathless, and still silent.

"Kate," Allison urged, "haven't you a single word for me? If you say no to me to-night—I don't know which way I shall turn—yes, I do know, but then I would not be fit to come to you. Kate, haven't you a word for me?"

"Yes," said Kate, in a low voice, "I have—if you can be patient." She had spoken almost without her volition. She had scarcely heard what he was saying; in the rush of her own feelings she received only a blurred impression.

"What do you mean?" he asked. He gripped her hands and turned her toward him a little so he could look into her eyes.

She returned his look gravely. She had spoken, and did not regret her impulse, but Kate had an instinct for honesty, and no wish to deceive. "I mean this, Dick," she said. "Ever since I have known you I have not felt that I was free to—to think about love—or free to encourage you in caring for me. I have always tried to make that plain to you——"

"You have indeed," Allison said, with some bitterness, "and I decided long ago that you had suffered some terrible disappointment back in the time before I first knew you, that made you cold to any man's pleading, but, Kate, can you mean that at last——"

"I have wanted to be honest with you," said Kate, interrupting his eagerness, "but it has not always been easy,"—her lips began to tremble—"as far as I can, I want to be honest with you now. There was a set of circumstances that constrained me, over which I had no control—when I can I will tell you what they were—I do not feel that I could to-night—but in a measure I am free to think and act more naturally. That is why I said if you would be patient——"

"You mean it will be possible for you to love me—to marry me?" he said, abruptly. "Kate, do you mean—you mean you have loved me—you love me now?" His voice had dropped suddenly to a whisper. Kate found no words, and turning he put his arm about her, drawing her to him until his head rested on her shoulder. "Why didn't you tell me

before?" he said, passionately. "Oh, Kate, why didn't you!" His forehead was hot against her cheek, and the arm about her shook. Forceful and determined though he was, Kate had more than once before had the feeling that she was his elder in experience and insight—it had much to do with the quality of her affection for him—but she had never seen him like this, and while it aroused wonder in her, it served to give her a certain poise. She lifted her hand touching his cheek gently.

"You will be patient—and wait for me, Dick?"

"I will do anything in the world for you," he said, his lips against her cheek.

She drew herself away, and he did not attempt to hold her, but returned to his query of the moment before. "But, Kate, why didn't you tell me before that—that this was possible?" He was regaining more of his usual manner.

"I told you—I have not felt free. You cannot understand, Dick, and I cannot explain in a few words——" She stopped with a sudden sinking of the heart that was almost faintness at the thought of retelling all that wretched story, and to tell only a part was not possible—she could *not* do it then. She had spoken to Horton under tremendous pressure, and driven by terror. Allison's love must be strong enough to give her time. "It is all so painful to me," she continued, "though I can look back and feel that

I am not to blame for the wretchedness in it. If I were I should never have let you ask me if I loved you. I want you to know all about what my difficulties have been, and because you love me you can help me, but I cannot talk about it to-night—when I am happy. I want you to consider if you are ready to wait until I can be perfectly open with you. It is not just myself I am thinking of, or I would not be acting as I am. I don't ask you to try and understand me—only let things rest as they were until you do understand—fully."

"They cannot rest where they were," Allison said, quickly. "You have confessed that you love me—and, you are going to marry me, Kate. I don't know what all this is that is worrying you, but it does not bother me; it never has. You never knowingly did a wrong thing in your life, and you are supersensitive—I have read you accurately in that, for I know something of human nature. You can tell me anything you wish whenever you are ready, but I didn't know until to-night that you *could* love me, and I am not going to let you go back of that, or escape me now—I need you too badly." His voice was sharp, alarmed, every vestige of the humility of the moment before gone. In a way Kate liked it, and her head lifted.

"I have no wish to go back of it," she said, clearly. "After all this time that you have been devoted to me, it is,"—her voice dropped—"I am glad to tell

you that much truth. But, Richard, I have not promised to marry you, and I will not promise or bind you or myself in any way until I know that I am doing what is right to you—and others. When I am sure of that, there shall not be a thought even of mine that I shall not be willing to give into your keeping." Her manner had the air of finality that Allison knew well.

"I must be satisfied with that, for a time." He lifted his shoulders, drawing a quick breath. "You have granted me so much more than I dared hope for, and I have something to hold to now you love me. You would not 'have a thought that you would not give into my keeping,' "—his voice held a note of deep feeling—"Kate, there are not many men who could say that truthfully. I never realized until to-night how fine you are—I am a poor thing beside you. I wish I were worthy of you." He lifted her hands, kissing them tenderly.

Kate looked down on his bent head with a sense of something curiously like pain. It occurred to her that he had had his years of manhood to live through—just as others she knew. She believed that on the whole he had lived them cleanly, and it should be enough for her. Perhaps he intended to tell her that he could not say to her what she had said to him, but she did not demand it. Was her love not great enough for faith? She was silent, and certain words

shaped themselves in her mind, "You have my every thought, my innermost desire—they are yours, utterly." Why should they come to her at this moment?

Allison was speaking again. "Kate, if you come to me I shall try to make you happy—and I need you so!" It was the reiterated plea of the evening; it had always been his plea, and Kate did not answer in words, but she put her hand in his, and to her it was a pledge of her loyalty. Allison held it tightly, and they sat silent for a long time. Kate had turned more than once from her own thoughts to listen for any sound in the house, but there was perfect quiet. Paquita must be sleeping, but it was growing late.

"You said you would have to go early in the morning, Dick," she said at last.

Allison startled slightly. "Yes, am I keeping you up too late, Kate. I don't want to go yet."

"You have a long ride back."

"I am contented here beside you. I shall have to go back to mountains of work,—and worries,—to-morrow."

"What worries?" Kate asked, only half seriously, for business anxieties seemed trivial things at that moment, and unworthy of mention, but Allison answered her quickly and eagerly. "Nothing—after to-night. You are sending me away the happiest man alive."

"Then why worries?" she insisted, smiling.

"I am mistaken," said Allison. "Such things have no place with us to-night."

"It was what I was thinking," Kate replied; "but, Dick, you will have to go, dear."

"I suppose I must," he assented, regretfully. "Oh, it has been good to be with you after these last hateful weeks! Kate, when are you going to let me see you again?"

"I shall write to you—perhaps I will come to Los Angeles before long." She smiled happily, as he rose and stood beside her.

"To stay for a time—will you?" His voice brightened with pleasure, but as Kate saw him now in the light that fell from the open hall door, she was struck with his pallor, and the drawn lines about his mouth. His eyes were dark under their black brows, and the faint bluish tinge of cheek and chin was more apparent than usual.

"Richard," she said, anxiously, "you look ill. Why do you work so hard, and let business matters worry you? It is so foolish. You have won too much success to let little things trouble you."

"I have won you," he said; "what else is there that counts. Come and take care of me and drive anxiety out of the window." He put his arms about her, and bent to kiss her, a long kiss, for the tenderness in Kate's heart stirred to meet his caress, but even then it was expressive of solemnity rather than the eagerness of love.

XV.

THE NIGHT OF RESOLVE

KATE went at once to her own room when Allison had gone. Mrs. Silence might come at any moment and Kate did not want to see her. To listen to ordinary conversation would have been actual pain. She wanted to be alone with her happiness, and she went to the window that looked out to the mountains.

The moon had conquered the haze of earlier evening, and hung round and clear in the heavens. There was not a breath to stir the shadows; they were marked distinct on the stretches of lawn and gravelled road. The valley lay indistinct, but the moon touched the mountains, tipping their sky line with a pale light like the last faint glow of a dying fire. It was perfectly still, a silence accentuated by the distant, smothered movement of the waves. The peace about her was only part with the deep happiness in Kate's own heart. She had not asked herself if her love had led her farther than she had intended. The uplift of her whole being was too great to allow of questioning. The pressure of Allison's lips had only deepened and magnified her resolve. Please God she would bring happiness to Paquita, and peace to Allison's restless unsatisfied spirit. With the morning she could think



PAQUITA STOOD HALF-CROUCHED AT THE BEDSIDE



more clearly. Her eyelids were heavy with the weariness of a day of many emotions and she turned from the window to prepare for the night, drawing the blinds and turning on the shaded light.

She slipped a wrapper on over her nightdress, and crossed the hall to Paquita's door, listening. She wanted a last look at the sleeping girl before she herself closed her eyes. There was not a sound, and she entered, cautiously closing the door behind her. The moonlight was dim in the room and as she stood still for a time trying to accustom her eyes to the gloom, there came to her from out the shadow by the bed, a faint chill that touched her oddly, a mere breath that crept along her brow and reached her hair, an indefinable thrill, merging into intangible fear. It had crept to her out of the gloom, weighted by a soft, sibilant, indrawn breath, and with the instinctive shrinking from a peril vaguely sensed, Kate drew back against the door, her cold fingers sweeping the wall to find the light. The pink glow flooded the blue and gold, and white, and the form beside the bed sprang out of the darkness an actuality that smote the eyes. Paquita stood half crouched, half lifted, at the bedside, her neck stretched as if for listening, her glowing eyes on the shrinking woman at the door. Her heavy hair was drawn back as if twisted away with a frantic hand from a ghastly face. There was a sunken look to the cheeks, and a thinness about the

lips that would not cover the white line of set teeth. It was a face dominated by the lowered brows and blazing eyes of pure animal fury, human only in its agony.

The shock of physical terror kept Kate standing, and the girl by the bed raised herself a little more and came forward a step, her shoulders still bent, her eyes unmoving. "*You—you thief,*" she said in a soft, thick whisper, indescribable in its emphasis. "Your sweet speaking—and your *money—you thief.*"

"She is mad," said Kate to herself. "She is ill——" She did not know she had spoken.

"I am *not* mad—I am *not* ill," said Paquita, in the same low voice. Kate had turned to the door to open it, the mechanical effort to seek for help, but the girl took a step forward, her clenched hands raised threateningly. "If you move I'll choke you to death," she said clearly.

Kate turned and faced her. The paralysis of terror was swept aside by an agony of pity and doubt, of wonder and concern, that brought her dazed faculties to the normal. What terrible thing had come to the girl, what should she do to help her?

"Paquita," she said, pleadingly; "my child!"

"I am not your child," said the girl, furiously. "I have nothing to do with you—there is no one on earth I want but him—there's never anybody I've wanted but him. I don't love any one I don't want

any one—but him——" Her voice broke in hoarseness.

"But who, Paquita?" Kate asked, gently, soothingly. She moved a little toward the girl.

"Don't come near me——!" said Paquita, her voice rising wildly. "I tell you he loves *me—me*. I don't care what he says to you, or if he kisses you—he's kissed me a hundred times—no matter what he says, I know he loves me. It's your money he tries to think about—it's always money, money, and what other people think, but down in him it's *me* he wants!" Her wild words dropped to huskiness again. "And I—I don't care if he would only be good to me. I told him so when he said he was going away—that if he would only take me I didn't care about anything else—and he—he wouldn't do it, and he left me—and then he wrote me that—that letter I got this morning—and I lay here, and then I heard his voice and I opened my door and—and I saw him—out there—kiss you——" The human agony had conquered fury, and she stood gasping and clutching at her breast. "When I was a little girl he used to come—often—and he always loved me and held me in his arms. He used to come to St. Mary's—he loved me then too. . . . When I got back to the house he came and he loved me then, but he was afraid. When I looked out there I knew what it was—it was you and your money that frightened him. I

hadn't anything—no people, no friends, no money, nothing to make me grand. I was just the little girl he used to know grown up—and he was afraid to stay, and he wrote me *that letter*. How could he—how could he—kill me—like—that——!" Her whole body heaved with tearless sobs. "I—I would be beaten to death for him, he might beat me himself if he were angry—I'd be a thing like Inez—I'd be *anything*—if he would only love me——" She turned for support to the high bed-post, laying her convulsed face against it. "I'll go to hell," she said in a harsh whisper. "I'll be like Inez now—I'll dance—oh, yes, *I'll dance*——" She turned about to face Kate's look of horror. "I will show you two what you have made me. Have your grand house—I'll not get out of your sight when every one points a finger at me. I'll be close to your doorstep. Maybe you can stand it—but not he——" She paused, gasping in pure exhaustion, and Kate gazed at her dumb and wide-eyed. There was a blindness that was dropping away from her vision, and a keen edge of suffering within her that was slowly cutting to the very heart of pain. The girl before her was not mad, no indeed, but there was an endless skein now for them to untangle, and each thread would be a live nerve, shrinking under the touch. Torture brought to Kate the dignity of suffering. She came to the girl unhesitatingly.

"Paquita," she said in her clear voice. "You for-

get you are my daughter—that comes first to me—before anything else in the world. Paquita, listen to me, dear——" The girl sprang from under her hand as from the touch of hot iron, her lips drawn back from her teeth, her eyes narrowed and gleaming, and the two stood looking into each other's eyes.

"I am *not* your daughter," Paquita repeated in the same sibilant whisper of a few moments before. "I am Julietta Overa's daughter. . . . Ah, that hurts you does it?" Kate's hand had dropped to her side and she stood quite still staring at the girl. Paquita laughed softly. Her ungoverned fury might belong to one parentage, but that soft laugh was her father's. She continued to smile at the petrified woman from under her lowered brows. "They fooled you finely didn't they—and I—I fooled them both, and you too. When I'm in hell I can laugh a little." Kate neither spoke nor moved, and Paquita turned with a lithe movement and caught up a small packet that lay on the bed, flinging it at Kate's feet. "There read about it," she said in the same soft voice. Kate stirred and looked down at the packet, a long look that had little meaning in it, and Paquita watched her with unchanged expression. When Kate looked up again there was a faint frown on her forehead a network of lines that lifted her brows curiously.

"You mean," she said in a voice that lacked its usual modulation. "You mean that James Payne

passed you off to me as my child for the sake of the money?"

"Yes."

"Why did you help him in it—for the sake of money too?"

"No," said Paquita, with a slight quiver of the lips that set again in a smile. "I thought he, Dick, would care for me—more—if I was the child of a rich woman. I found out their plan and I got hold of Inez's letters, and Inez never knew I knew a thing about it—not till it was all arranged. She might laugh for a little while at having fooled me, but she wouldn't laugh long when she found the papers gone. She would be scared so sick she will never dare tell—*my father.*" The girl's sneer deepened on the last two words.

"You appear to be an amiable family," Kate said, a fleck of color coming into her cheeks.

"I don't belong to you, anyway!" said the girl, her eyes widening and blazing.

"That is perhaps fortunate for me," Kate replied. She looked down, touching the packet of letters with the toe of her slipper, and when she raised her face again to Paquita's burning gaze, her own eyes were aflame with the white fire of scorn. There was the glint of burnished steel in the glance with which she swept the girl. "I suppose, Paquita Payne," she said, more deliberately than usual, "that it has

occurred to you—if it has not, it will, as you are your father's daughter, and possess something of his peculiar cast of mind—that you have done a very foolish thing. There's a name in law for this sort of thing, but we will pass over that—there is a sense of honor that is higher than law. Do you suppose for a moment that Richard Allison, however much he loved you when you were a child, or feared you when he found you the sort of woman you are, would so much as look at you, if he thought you capable of doing a thing like this? If you were a scarlet woman, as you declare you will be, he could love you more easily than if he knew you capable of this. The woman who saved him from such a creature as you are capable of being would be doing him the greatest kindness of his life. It is a monstrous thing you have done. You crept into my house like a snake, a thing with poison in its heart, acting a lie from morning till night. I took you into my innermost heart—I allowed you to look into what is most sacred to me—I lavished love on you and caresses. I suffered terrible anxiety, for your sake I bent my pride—I endured everything because of my love for you——" Kate stooped and lifted the packet of letters and held them, standing for a moment tall and straight before the girl, her finger pointed at Paquita's twitching face. "You have bitten the hand that caressed you—the only hand that could have saved you from what you have brought

upon yourself; think a little of it before you go to sleep under my roof." She drew back from the girl with a soft sweep of her trailing skirts, and went out closing the door carefully behind her.

Kate stood again in her own room. The covers of the bed were laid back, the curtain before the window stirred slightly, touched by some wandering breath, and the shaded light rested warmly on everything, the exact picture of twenty minutes before, but to Kate years had passed since she last saw it. There was a spot beneath her breast that burned like fire, and a quick pulse beat in her throat, but her head was clear, and her hands cold.

She came forward and put the packet of letters on her open desk, and then moved about deliberately preparing for bed. She would read them later, there was no haste—there was no need of haste about anything. She was at last quite free to do exactly what she chose. She drew the pins from her hair, and brushed and combed the burnished mass, leaving it loose on her shoulders—she would coil it up when she went to bed. So at last she could turn her back completely on the past—even on the recollection of all that was sickening—if she willed it so she would have the strength to do it. Under what obligation was she to any one? She had borne herself honestly and honorably throughout it all—what woman could

do more. She had been lied to, tortured, duped, the sweetest and most sacred thing, the innermost sanctuary of her woman's heart, polluted, desecrated—but what had that to do with her? Let it rest with those who were guilty of such sacrilege. She would sweep her heart clean of their foot-prints, and begin anew. What did she not have in her favor, beauty, position, wealth, and a breast young enough to give life to her second born. What was it that Allison had cried to her? "Kate, I need you—I need you——" Truly he needed her, and even more than he knew! The ungoverned woman, capable of sin, had tempted him, smiling at him from the face of a child, and he had fled from her. Was it to his discredit that he had done so, that he had turned from "What appealed to the least admirable" in him? Each word of his stood out now clearly, dragged from subconscious memory into the light of an understanding made vivid by anger. Let such qualities as had gibed at her in the last unspeakable hour seek their fitting place. Was she called upon to stretch out an ineffective hand? Allison had come to her in his need as to the best and truest that he knew, and she would not fail him. He wanted the strength of her spirit to lean upon, she had always freely shown him that side of her nature, but what of the other that she had so carefully hidden? She stood with her head held high before her mirror, and turned a brighter

light upon her reflection. It looked at her from the glass, smiling faintly, and she scanned it with a veiled glance that grew into brilliancy at the realization of its beauty:—the forehead with its arch of brow, the curve of cheek and chin, the sweep of heavy lashes, and the soft allure of the slightly parted lips. Her eyes fell to the full throat, dimpled at the shoulders, and the swell of her bosom, half hidden by the lace of her nightdress, and then came back to the smouldering fire of her eyes. Would the man who laid his head on her breast find it a cold or hard resting place? She turned from her mirror with a lifted lip. Money! She had a far more tempting dowery than mere money at her command!

She drew a chair to her desk, and untied and unwrapped the packet of letters with a steady hand. There were four letters in yellowed envelopes, and three photographs tied separately with a faded blue ribbon. Kate pushed the packet of photographs from her, and laid the letters out on the desk. She arranged them in order of time, for they were all clearly post-marked. The first was marked Los Angeles, and bore the date of November 25, 1893, fifteen years earlier, just three weeks before she herself had arrived in Los Angeles. The letter she held, like the other three, was addressed to Miss Inez Overa, and Kate knew the hand well, the heavy downward and the ineffective upward strokes. It brought the vision of

James Payne vividly to her. It was a letter of financial plans for the future, with an invitation to the woman to join him. It was the few sentences at the end that had an interest for Kate. "If you make up your mind that you are ready to come out here and take pot luck with me," the writer concluded, "I want you, of course, to bring little Julietta with you. She's two years old now, isn't she? Lord, how old time goes! We'll take the two children and set up a model household up north, or if times don't prosper, I will put them both in a home in Victoria. Anita, she's the old Mexican woman I hired to take care of Kate's baby, arrived the other day, and we put the baby at The Sisters'. They were horrified that the infant had not been christened, so the good souls promptly gave her a name, and I suppose made her a good Catholic at the same time.

"No, I have not heard a word from my wife, and I am not likely to. I don't take kindly to interference in my affairs, and I think she has learned a lesson that will keep her quiet." Then a curious note in the man's character revealed itself—"but mind, I will have no talk against Kate, necessity's one thing and right another. I had necessity on my side, I generally have, but Kate has right on hers. She is a stranger to you as you are to her—forget that she was ever anything else to me, and let things rest.

"If you come, and, Enie, I want you badly enough,

arrange to take the Santa Fé. There is talk of the road's bringing out a crowd of mining men, a sort of combination business and pleasure affair, and you better find out about it and come with the crowd, *cara mia*. You may pick up some valuable information en route. . . . Enie, I am not much good on paper, but when I kiss you you will not be unhappy.

"Your lover as always,

"JAMES S. PAYNE."

Kate thrust the letter aside with a shaking hand, and lifted the next. It was dated three years later, and was sent from Victoria, B.C. It was a long letter, sheet after sheet, clearly written, carefully worked out, the scheme of a land theft in a northern Pacific State. Kate read it hurriedly, seeking for the paragraph that came at the very end. "I took time to go out to the Home and see the children yesterday. Julietta hasn't grown an inch, but Frances is tall for her age, and I, who shouldn't say it, declare that they are two pretty children. Julietta has the Overa look, but she is really like me, and Frances is her mother's own child, all but the eyebrows. I was moved to give them a holiday, so picture me, the distant relative, sedately walking off under the severe eyes of the matron, an infant clinging to each hand.

"I may as well wait about here until I have further word about the deal, and then for Seattle, and you, sweetheart, . . ."

The Night of Resolve

Kate's lips parted in a quivering sigh, and she read the next letter through fast-dropping tears. It was short and abrupt, and was dated only two weeks later: "Dear Inez, the Washington land deal is off if I can't raise another two thousand, and I will drop it for a while, and join you in Seattle.

"I don't suppose it's of any particular interest to you, but Frances died yesterday at the Home, and Julietta is down with diphtheria too—most of the children are. Julietta will pull through for she has a mild case, and when she is up I am going to bring her along with me. I have an idea I can get hold of some money in Los Angeles, but we will talk it over.

"I wondered to-day when the preacher was saying his prayer over the grave, which of the two babies, Frances or Julietta was the luckiest. There wouldn't be any reason for thinking about it at all if they had only buried me when I was the same age. That would have been the best thing all around, I suppose."

Kate had dropped the letter and sat with bent head and heavy eyes. The proud lift of the head was gone, and the little lines that speak of the years lived through, had appeared about her lips and on her brow. She sat a long time as one bent over in physical pain, and she opened the last letter slowly and wearily. It was written in anger, real or assumed, and sent from Los Angeles. "Yes," James wrote, "I *have* taken Julietta to The Sisters', and I *have* told them that she

was the baby they baptized four years ago, and Frances Payne she is, and Frances Payne she will remain. I have my own reasons for it, and I'll remind you that you may be her aunt, but I am her father, and I shall do as I think best. If you want to break with me for a foolish thing that does not concern you, you can.

"You are ridiculous. You do not care a copper for the child, it's something else that's worrying you, Enie. You think that because I will not marry you, in spite of the fact that I am free, I still have a vision of poor Kate in my brain, and that I want the child as a hold on her. Perhaps I do, but not in the way you think. I have had enough of matrimony and children. The one reason you and I keep together is that there is nothing binding us to do so, and we would better let good enough alone. I have told you more than times enough, that I love you better than any one else living, and more than that I can't do—you will have to be satisfied with it.

"I haven't patience to write business to you today, but I am well, and things look encouraging. I advise you to think things over, and write me sensibly. Until then I shall keep my own counsel."

With stiff fingers Kate untied the ribbon that held the photographs, and they lay on the table before her. She gazed at them steadily until memory came to her aid. The little dreamy-eyed, dimpled child, of level

brows and slow smile carried her back through the years to that wretched, well-remembered journey. She could see now the car with its succession of seats, and the little child who wandered away from the highly-colored, bold-eyed woman, and came to nestle in her arms. The child's face was not so unlike the Paquita Kate had taken into her heart that she failed to recognize the resemblance. Kate laid it down gently beside the photograph of the brilliant-hued, carmine-lipped woman of the train whom she also recognized now, the Inez Overa of the letters, and the miserable crippled woman of the desolate house above the arroyo. But the third she did not know, and she drew it up to her with a low cry, the little pictured face, with its wide deep eyes and soft curls. She held it to her cheek, her lips, and close to her breast. "My baby—my baby!" the mother said, and the spot of fire beneath her breast was quenched, and the blood throbbed again in her finger-tips and around her cold lips. . . . In a world that held so passionate a delight and such exquisite pain, what place was there for anger, contempt, and revenge, the passions of jealousy and self-gratification? They were little things and far away. They stirred only the surface of pain, and hovered on the borderland of delight.

As Kate sat the night through, her head bent on the pictured face, the crowding thoughts came, now vividly clear, now dimmed by pain, an ever-moving

procession. . . . Was not mother love the vital flame caught from mother earth? Inexorable she was in her laws, but her sun shone on the unjust as well as the just, the crippled as well as the strong. . . . Were the crippled of mind less worthy of tenderness than the crippled of body? . . . The creature that walked on all fours, the bird that flew, even the thing that crawled, guarded and yearned over its young; but the being that was breathed upon by the divine, that lifted its troubled eyes to the Infinite, and pondered over good and evil, was *her* love not great enough to gather to her breast the motherless, though not of her own flesh or nurture? And as in the long hours when out of her girlhood grew the strength of her womanhood, so out of the trial of her womanhood was born a greater possibility.

XVI.

THE CHILD OF THE RUINED GARDEN

THE pale gray of dawn was yielding in the eastern horizon to a misty pink, when Kate again opened Paquita's door and stood within the threshold. The faint glow of morning showed through the half-open window, but the room was still chill in its winding sheet of gray. The white of the bed was distinct, and sitting beside it on the floor, was Paquita, her body leaning against it, her head buried in her folded arms. Kate could not tell if she was awake for her hair covered her, but she came close and stood looking down at her.

"Paquita," she whispered. The girl moved and lifted her head, brushing back the hair from her face. She looked up at Kate, then clutching the bed-clothes drew herself to her feet. Kate had washed and dressed for the day, her hair gathered back in its usual soft waves. Her face was dead white, save for the color in her lips, and her eyes dark ringed, but it was a steady light that looked out of their gray depths. Her look softened into unshed tears, at the utter misery of the girl's attitude. The swollen lines of long and uncontrolled weeping had sunk into sodden pallor, and her heavy eyes lacked all

expression. She stood uncertainly, with drooping shoulders.

"Paquita," Kate said, more clearly, "my poor child!" The call was indescribable in its tenderness, illimitable in its promise of comfort, and the girl came into the woman's embrace and clung to her breast like the drowning to his bit of driftwood.

"My child," Kate said again, her lips against Paquita's cold cheek. Each had thought the source of tears gone dry in the night, but at the touch of tenderness they ran afresh. Kate drew the girl to the low seat beside the bed, and held her as Paquita half knelt, half clung to her neck.

"I will go away—to-day," Paquita said, trembling all over. "I will go to The Sisters',"—her voice rose to a choked cry—"I can't be like Inez, I *cannot*, I *cannot!*"

"You will stay with me and be really my child, Paquita," Kate said. "I want you, for my heart is so empty. We will put the past far behind us and make a beautiful place of the future. Anything it is in my power to give you, you shall have, but we must work together, Paquita."

"I am not fit," said the girl, shivering. "I am a liar, and a thief. Last night I could have killed you—I am worse than Inez even. I will go to The Sisters' and pray to our Lady to forgive me." It was the ineradicable training of childhood brought to the surface in this hour of stress.

"You may go to The Sisters', dear, and pray to the Good Mother and she will hear you, but, Paquita, you must come back to me. I want you, and there may be another who will want you."

The girl raised her head, and bracing herself against Kate's shoulders with shaking hands, drew back and looked into her face. "You could want me after what I have done—after what I said to you last night?" Her dull eyes widened in slowly growing wonder.

"Yes," said Kate in her sweet voice, "and, Paquita, I mean that you shall have your happiness so far as I can give it to you. Would I hesitate for one instant if you were my very own daughter? You are helpless, hampered, motherless, a child trying to walk alone. If you have not the strength, if you are not fit, what chance have you had to make yourself so? I was ready to struggle endlessly for you—am I going to turn my back upon you simply because you were not borne by me? Another woman bore you in suffering, probably as great as my own. I don't know how to tell my feeling to you, Paquita, I couldn't say it in words to myself, but I know that it is the strongest thing in me—and I want to give you only what I should have gladly given to my own."

"You mean you will not try to take him away—that you want to help me to be so that he——" Her words were lost in a whisper. A flash of color swept

over her face, making her eyes brilliant, touching every feature with vivid beauty. It flamed up and sank away. "I am not fit," she said as before. "He does not want me, he is afraid of me. He says in his letter we could never be happy, that he would love me for a little time and then be sorry always afterwards; that I am a child and don't know the meaning of things—but I do, I do! I love him and he doesn't want me." A quiver of agony crossed her face, making her words difficult. "It was that that made me wild—and to see him kiss you. I knew then that I wasn't fit, and I knew it last night when I sat here and thought. Why shouldn't he want you—rather than me—even if he loved me. You are *good*, and I —I'm—I could be like Inez, and that's why he doesn't want me and is afraid." She stopped, choking, and then began again, her hands gripping Kate's shoulders.

"Nobody ever loved me but him. I didn't remember quickly like most children—I remember him first of all, almost, and I only wanted to be so he would care for me. When I was little I used to dance, and laugh, and talk, just to make him like me, and to make him look pleased, and kiss me. When I was bigger I wanted money, and friends, and things like you have them, because I knew they were the things that he cared about—I wanted them just so he would love me. I told lies to Inez because I *hated* her—I never

told them to him. I was always afraid that Inez was my mother, and I knew Mr. Payne was my father —I could feel it—and I didn't want Dick to think so too. I wanted to be altogether different from such people. When I came back from St. Mary's, and Dick came, I dressed up as beautifully as I could, and I tried to make him love me every way I knew how. I could make him kiss me as if he would never let me go, but the next minute he was afraid. I didn't know the right way to make him love me, and I only asked him to—to take me away with him when I was wild. If he gave me up I *couldn't live.* . . . But he wouldn't stay,—and he wouldn't take me—he said he loved me too much to do either, but he promised to write to me, and he did once, only a few lines, and then I waited and waited." Paquita took her hands from Kate's shoulders and wrung them, and Kate listened to her with blanching lips.

"When Mr. Payne told me you were my mother, and Inez said it was true, it seemed to me the Good God had opened heaven. You would teach me how to make Dick really want me—you were like the people he was proud of—always I had longed and prayed for it. Always at St. Mary's when the other girls whispered when they knelt—I prayed my own prayer, and it was always the same—that I would be so that Dick would love me, only just that. . . . After they told me and I listened and thought for a time,

I grew afraid; there was something they were hiding from me, and the more I thought the more certain I was. I stole Inez's letters to find out. She used to faint sometimes after she had been angry and screamed at me. That day I asked her what it was they were planning, and she laughed and jeered at me, and I told her what I thought of her—I—I called her a name I never could when I was afraid I belonged to her, and I said it more than once, and she went wild and cursed me." The girl frowned heavily. "I had to bathe her head then, and I saw the key to her trunk around her neck. I had often seen it before, and I knew she never let any other person touch her trunk—it was in the same room with her always, close by her chair. She kept papers in it, and the dresses she used to wear before she came to the old house. I thought if I took her papers I could make her tell me the truth. I took them out and put the key back around her neck. When she was all right again I read them, locked up in my room. Almost in the first letter I found out who I was. I belonged to people like *that!*" The girl gasped. "Inez broke my mother's heart. She stole my father from her—and he was—he is—oh!" Kate took the girl's twisting hands and held them tightly. "I burned every letter," said Paquita, passionately. "There was no one else in the world should read them, but I kept those four that told most about me,

and after a while I thought what I should do, for I could not let Dick go—I *could* not. You wanted a child and I would come to you—if you didn't know, what great difference did it make? I would love you all I could,"—her lips began to tremble, the tears rising in her eyes—"and when you loved me a great deal I would tell you about Dick and you would help me. But he was so long in writing, and they were worrying you to death—and then he wrote—cruelly, I would rather he killed me—I felt as if he had killed me, and then I heard his voice and I opened the door and saw—and I could have killed—you—I could have been like Inez—I—I——" Her voice had risen to a cry, and Kate caught her convulsively, pressing her face to her breast.

"Paquita!" she said, brokenly. "Paquita!—God forgive us all!" She held her for a long time without any other word, her cheek bent to the girl's head. Then she spoke slowly, even sternly. "Paquita, you must never say that again. You are not like Inez—you will *never* be like Inez. You have been close to those who would lie and steal, and in fighting for your happiness you have used the only weapons you have been taught to use. Put that all behind you. Whatever the blood in you, the soul in you is greater—I have felt it in the last few moments. It was your immense love that awakened it in you, that nourished it until it is the larger part of you, and,

Paquita, good is so very much stronger than evil. I can almost see what the future will be." She kissed the girl gently. "You are going to stay with me, until Richard Allison takes you away from me."

Paquita did not lift her head, and it was very hard to say, but it was born from the travail of the night, and she dragged it forth. "You would be better—for him," she said.

"I think not," said Kate, smiling faintly. "Your Richard has very many faults, Paquita, and I understand some things better now. He would, in the end, have found it as impossible to conquer his love, even for the sake of ambitions and imaginary ideals, as you would have found it impossible to be what in a moment of frenzy your imagination suggested. I see it very clearly now. He loved you dearly as a little girl, and when you were a child and a woman both, he loved you as a woman, though he did not know it. When you showed yourself to him as a woman, openly, crudely perhaps, in your red and yellow parlor above the arroyo, he was startled and afraid—but I think he loved you just the same. I think the little child had a place in his heart, and the woman crept into that place without his leave. . . . I had all the worldly enticements, I know, Paquita, and I had esteem, affection, and something of reverence—and they are a great deal—some people say everything—but I never had what you have, and what belongs to you shall be yours."

Paquita listened with lifted head now, wide-eyed and breathless. "But if he doesn't esteem me—if he is afraid—what can I do?"

"That is your work in the future—and mine," said the elder woman, still gently. "You dreamed of what money and friends would do, Paquita, and they are at your command, but I think the little loving child of the ruined garden will be your best ally." And though Paquita as yet only half understood, she reached up and drew Kate's cheek to her own.

XVII.

TRIAL BY FIRE

ALLISON had passed three absorbed hours over the pile of documents on the desk before him and when at last he gathered them up to return them to the safe, he uttered an exclamation of relief. He had come back to an accumulation of business that claimed every moment of his time. Three days had passed since his evening in Moneta Valley with Kate, and he had scarcely found time to eat or sleep; even the evenings he had spent at the office, busied over his papers. He had sent a short letter to Kate, for in the rush of work he had made time for that, but he had not heard from her.

He was free now to go to his apartment and rest in preparation for another hurried day, but he felt no great desire to go. He was tired enough, but not sleepy. He looked at his watch and found that it was almost eleven o'clock, and then in his usual methodical manner he cleared his desk for the next morning, carefully putting away the pages of notes he had been making. Another day or two would find him much more free, and yet he was conscious that he did not desire it particularly, any more than he wished for the relaxing atmosphere of his comfortable apart-

ment. The surroundings that suggested a stress of work were preferable. For the same reason he did not care to smoke—it was not his habit to smoke when he worked.

He seated himself, his hands clasped behind his head, his chair tipped back so as to look out at the cloud streaked sky. He was endeavoring to turn his thoughts to the demands of the coming day, but thoughts are the least easy of servants to control, and instead of busying themselves in preparations for the next day's labors, they turned determinedly to other matters. They lingered over his four weeks of holiday just past with a sense of utter distaste. When in all his knowledge of himself had he experienced such a period of vacillation, feverish misery, and positive unhappiness? From the night over five weeks before when he had looked up and seen Paquita's slender scarlet figure poised above him, to the moment when he had dropped his carefully written and well considered letter into the post-box, it had been one long struggle on his part against emotions strong, disquieting, grown beyond his control. He had fled from the cause of them—a holiday indeed! . . . He thought now of Paquita with a stab of pain that sent the blood to his head, and drew a sharp breath from him. He might toil over his papers, or plan his future; he might close his eyes to the vision that constantly presented itself, and bolster his determination by

every argument at his command, and all the power of resistance he possessed, but the vision would not vanish. It came again and again between him and everything he looked upon. It was the vision of Paquita left desolate in the ruined garden. To whom would she turn, and to what? Allison set his teeth to do battle with the thought that crept like slow fire over every inch of his body, an actual physical torment. She would be flung out into the world to be leered at by coarse eyes, touched by coarse hands, and he would be powerless to prevent. . . . The paroxysm came and passed as it had done before and what Allison called his reason reasserted itself. Paquita must make her struggle as others had done. If he considered carefully he might discover some means of assisting her in the future. He breathed more evenly as he told himself that he had a right to set his interests first—no, not his interests only, but hers as well, for what Paquita had asked of him was an utter impossibility, and would have resulted in nothing but wretchedness to her. If he himself had imagined in wild moments that he could set aside his pride, and ambition, and affection, and above all his common sense, and take that untutored, irresponsible, passionate girl, and put her in the place he had always regarded as belonging by every right, and social as well as personal obligation, to a woman her exact opposite, he had been mad that was all. If he had at moments considered

such a thing as a possibility, that last painful hour with Paquita would have been sufficient to decide him. He told himself that it had decided him. She had struck at the very citadel of his prejudices. A man's domestic life should be as well ordered as his business day, and controlled by ordinary common sense as well as by affection. There was no possible lasting happiness, at least for him, under any other circumstances. His convictions were too deeply ingrained in him to admit of a doubt of it. Such as his gods were, he worshipped them, and he would only have been doing violence to the ineradicable in him if he had yielded to a passion strangely commingled with tenderness for immaturity and ignorance, and married a girl of Paquita's shortcomings. But was that the real temptation from which he had fled? What was it that had taken him to the Summit Hill house when he felt so sure of his attitude? Why after that first night had he yielded to the longing to return, not once, but several times? What was the unspeakable, vaguely suggested compromise that had sprung into a possibility on that last night when Paquita had clung to his neck and pleaded for her happiness? Allison took his hands from behind his head and pressed them to his eyes as if to shut away from sight a thing too painful to contemplate. The little smiling child that had clung to his hand—and he could have let that thought find a lodgment in his brain even

for a few ungoverned moments. . . . It must be a passion compounded of sordid elements that would make such a thought possible. Thank God, he had been strong enough to turn his back upon it all, and cling to early convictions and ideals! His reward had been far greater than his desert, and it had come so quickly that he was still dazed by its suddenness. Why dwell on past vacillations with such a future at hand? Two months earlier he would have floated on the top wave of satisfaction at thought of the prospect before him. But now the deepened fold between his eyes lost but little of its significance.

He turned his thoughts determinedly to Kate, and dreamed for a time. What a home they could make together. She satisfied every craving of his pride, his every belief in the true nobility of womanhood. He smothered the voice of reproach under carefully built structures of the future and as he stared up into the faintly lit sky he won a partial content in place of his restlessness. The moon was almost hidden behind a gathering of fleecy clouds, and Allison watched them move slowly across the moon's face into the heavier cloud-bank beyond. The street sounds were quieted, the hush of midnight had come. A warm glow flickered and danced at intervals on the edges of the cloud-bank, like fire on snow, or the trails of heat-lightning along the horizon, and Allison watched it idly. Then a warmer glow rested on the piled

clouds, turning them a rosy pink that darted and flared into a more fiery red, and Allison rose and went to the window, moved by a faint sense of curiosity. To his extreme left the whole horizon flamed in a glow that burned and flickered and shot up, reaching higher and higher. It was its reflection that touched the clouds above. There was a fire somewhere beyond the Angel's Flight. As Allison stood watching, there came from far away the hurried clang and rattle of a fire-engine, and to the east another, smothered by the distance. Then the lighted engine-house a half block away sprang into life, and the engine, truck and ladder, and hose cart, turned into the street directly beneath him, tearing with a shrill scream and clatter through the quiet of the night. Allison leaned his arm on the window-sill listening. It must be some distance away, but it was a large fire that would call out the down town engines. He felt a vague satisfaction that he was not called upon to rush with the engines; he realized with a sort of surprise that he was terribly tired, and that the night breeze was cool and refreshing. He went back to his desk and lighted a cigar, and came again to the window, watching the changing lights on the clouds. The glow had sprung higher and still higher, seen redly now through the rolling billows of smoke, and the play of colors on the clouds was so marvellous that Allison did not leave the window. He had watched a full half hour, when

suddenly a column of flame shot high into the heavens, sinking back into volumes of smoke, the collapse of a fiery giant into a bed of coals. The glow was still brilliant, but began to pale at the edges, and Allison realized the lateness of the hour with a sense of chill. It was time that he sought his apartment and his bed.

He went down into the quiet street, and found a policeman at the entrance to the building, his face turned up to the fading glow. "Where is the fire?" Allison asked in passing, though he was conscious of caring very little where it was.

"Somewhere about Summit Hill," the man said. "It's a big one."

Allison felt a touch like a cold finger along his spine, and he stood still. An automobile had spun up to within a yard of him, and a young man sprang out of it, almost running over Allison in his haste, for his head was turned to call a hasty "thanks" to the chauffeur.

"Beg pardon!" he said to Allison, and Allison recognized him. He was a *Globe* reporter, making for the office two doors below.

Allison was at his side in an instant. "The fire," he said sharply, "where is it?"

"The old Payne house," said the young man, "and the hell of a blaze—the whole rotten thing fell—two firemen caught, and two women burned—if I can

only get it in in time!" They were at the door of the *Globe* office, and Allison caught the other by the arm.

"What two women?" he asked, hoarsely.

"A crippled woman and a girl—they got the old woman out. . . . Why, do you know them?" the young man asked, halted by Allison's ghastly look; but Allison had turned after the departing automobile and the young man saw him dash into the street and reach its step as it whirled around the corner.

XVIII.

ONLY KATE CAN TELL YOU

"Mrs. Silence! I am *very* fortunate!" Aunt Silence turned quickly to receive a hand clasp that had all the warmth of extreme pleasure. Horton Payne stood before her, hat in hand, the smile that bared his big white teeth expressive of real delight. Aunt Silence had just come out of the Alexandria and had paused for a doubtful moment on the sidewalk, her eyes raised to the heavily overcast sky. It was a rare day for August, a sudden break in the continued warm dry breath from the desert. One smelt the ocean in the air, and the clouds were heavy enough for rain.

"So you are back at last!" Aunt Silence exclaimed. "Have you come from your ranch?" If Horton wore a look of joy, so also did Aunt Silence.

"I reached my ranch last night, and took the first train this morning to Los Angeles," Horton explained. "I went out at once to your house to see you, and Hop sent me back again to find you here at the Alexandria. He said you were down town for a day of shopping, and that you usually came here for lunch—there was the chance of finding you. I am lucky to have caught you."

"Dear me!" Aunt Silence said, the irrepressible corner of her mouth lifting. "I suppose I haven't told you that I am particularly glad to see you. Of course you received my letter and its enclosure?"

"Yes—and Mrs. Silence, come somewhere where we can talk, please. Have you had lunch?" Horton was still holding Aunt Silence's hand, as if fearful of losing her.

"I was just going to lunch with some friends—but it really looks like rain——"

"It is going to pour," Horton declared, promptly, and without so much as glancing at the sky. "It is an engagement you can break, Mrs. Silence?"

"It is one I suppose I shall break," Aunt Silence said, laughing a little.

"And lunch with me, please? Here at the hotel?" Horton was eager.

"It is very early," Aunt Silence objected, looking really happy. The last few weeks had been as thoroughly unsatisfactory a period as Mrs. Silence had ever spent. The troubled lift of her brows had become an almost constant expression, the upward twitch of her mouth exceedingly rare. The sight of Horton pleased her greatly.

"So much the better, Mrs. Silence," Horton said. "We shall have the longer time to talk. Shall we go in now?" Aunt Silence made no further objection, and turned back into the hotel with Horton. He led

the way into the dining room, choosing a table a little apart from the others. It was so early that they were almost alone in the large room.

"Now," Horton exclaimed, "this *is* good!" A waiter stood expectant of their order, but Horton waved him off. "Just bring us—anything!" he exclaimed, impatiently. "And you don't need to hurry the order—" then mindful of Mrs. Silence's amused glance, he recovered his usual politeness. "I beg your pardon, Mrs. Silence," he said, coloring, "I was not thinking about things to eat—what shall I order for you?"

Aunt Silence looked at his flushed face and eager eyes with an expression that held a good deal of affection. "That order will satisfy me," she assured him. "We will let you choose for us," she said to the waiter, "and you can bring it to us a little later."

"Thank you," Horton said, gratefully. "That was what I wanted to say to him. . . . Mrs. Silence, it is very good to see you again!"

"Is that the reason for all this excitement?" Aunt Silence asked.

Horton flushed even more warmly. "Mrs. Silence, where is Kate?" he demanded.

She smiled at him understandingly, a glance touched with gravity. "She has gone away," she said. "She has gone to Europe."

"To Europe!" Horton exclaimed, his face fall-

ing. "You did not tell me that in your letter, but I understand now. Your letter and the news it contained was six weeks old. They had held it for me at the ranch, for I was expected any day. If I had only known I should have hurried more over my return, but at that time there seemed no particular object in haste—I was as well off in one place as another. Your news astounded me; I was dazed by it, and I came straight to you." Horton's face had settled into gravity and Aunt Silence also looked thoughtful.

"It has been a year of surprises," she said. "It is a year and a month since you left, and it has been crowded full." Aunt Silence watched Horton thoughtfully as she asked, "Did James Payne return with you?"

Horton looked up quickly. "No," he said, "James is in Australia and will remain there." His look hardened, his voice grown cold. "You once told me, Mrs. Silence, that it was best to keep family affairs in the family, but you are a connection of mine now, and you may as well know the truth. James has incurred the displeasure of the government, and will be looked after by them for some time to come. He has always had an irresistible inclination for crooked dealing, but when I took him out to Australia I gave him a chance. It was no use. In six months time he was in trouble, for I had taken pains to have him so carefully watched that he found it impossible to

escape. I had had a faint hope that he might walk straight, but his disease is too deep seated."

"I am sorry I asked about him," Aunt Silence said, distressed, "I was thinking of Paquita. Kate told me how he had neglected Paquita as a child, and I hoped that he had not returned."

"I have told you," Horton said, "and I know the knowledge is safe with you. Next to Kate there is no one to whom I feel I can speak so freely as to you. James's career has reached the conclusion that I feared was inevitable, and I wanted him as far away as possible when it should occur. The life of a convict will not be to James's taste, but as he has sown he will have to reap. He is safe where he is—his day is over—let us not think about him, . . . but Aunt Silence," and Horton's smile was appealing now, "won't you tell me what has happened, and just a little about Kate? You said almost nothing about her in your letter."

"There was so little for me to say—so little I could write," Aunt Silence answered.

"When did she go?" Horton asked.

"She left two weeks ago," Aunt Silence replied. "She said nothing to me of her plans until the very last, but I think she had decided long before that she would go, and she appeared quite determined to go alone—and—and of course I felt that she knew best——" There was a quiver now in Aunt Silence's voice that she resolutely suppressed.

"You mean she went entirely alone, no one with her whom she knew?"

"Not a soul," Aunt Silence said. "It was hard for her to tell me that she wanted to go alone, for she didn't want to hurt me, but at last she did. She was loving to me—Kate has always been loving to me, but she told me at last how she felt. She said she longed to get away for a time from every association of these last sixteen years. That she wanted to go back to the places she had visited when she was a child. She said the longing had grown in her until it was beyond her control. She wanted to satisfy it, and then come back to me—she said—that Paquita would not need her any more, and—and she would come back to me—she promised that—but she would go alone. Of course," Aunt Silence said, her voice quite beyond her control now, "she was right to go if she felt she must, but—but—I have no child—Horton—and I can't help loving Kate——" Aunt Silence stopped and impatiently jerked her handkerchief from her sleeve. "I am just an old goose!"—she declared, in smothered tones from behind its folds,—"just a foolish old woman!" Horton's lips twitched, and leaning over he took the hand that did not hold the handkerchief and clasped it tightly. Aunt Silence continued after a moment. "As I remarked before, I am an old goose," she declared with emphasis, "but—but I haven't enjoyed the last year." She took her hand

from Horton's and sat up straight with an air of determination. "I don't know when I have behaved like this—I am ashamed."

Horton smiled at her rather sadly, the network of lines at the corners of his eyes more apparent. "I know, Aunt Silence," he said, "but we are better off loving than unloving."

"And here I sit snuffling," Aunt Silence exclaimed, indignantly, "when I ought to be telling you just what has happened! . . . They wrote to you about the burning of the Payne house, of course?"

"My agent wrote me," Horton said. "He laid the blame on the old Mexican woman, and her kitchen fire, but I fancy the chimney was a sieve. I should never have consented to that crippled woman's remaining there, only she begged so hard to be allowed to stay—poor wretch!"

Aunt Silence shuddered slightly. "Matters moved quickly for us after that," she said. "The morning after the fire I had my luncheon alone, for Paquita had not been well for a couple of days, and Kate who looked ill enough herself was with her constantly. Hop brought me the Los Angeles paper, and the account of the fire—two columns of horrors—stared at me from the front page. It was graphic enough, all of it, to turn one ill, and Paquita was declared to be one of the victims. As I read I understood how naturally the mistake had come about, but I must tell

Kate at once. I took the paper to her in her room, and waited until she had finished reading. She stood some time afterwards thinking deeply, and then she said, 'I must correct the mistake about Paquita as soon as possible. It is too late for the evening papers.'

"'You won't say much will you, Kate?' I asked.

"'Only that Paquita has been staying here with friends, and the report a mistake—nothing more.'

"'You will have to give your name,' I said. 'We will be besieged by reporters.'

"'Yes, of course,' she said, 'but I am not afraid of them.' She went then and talked with Paquita, and afterwards telephoned her message to Los Angeles. It was published the next morning in the papers, and in due time a reporter appeared on our porch, but some one else came before he did. Kate had looked very white all morning and her eyes bright, but she had walked down to the beach with Paquita, who was able to be up again, and it struck me that they were both waiting for something. Paquita seemed to cling to Kate with a sort of helplessness I had never seen in her before. We sat together on the porch most of the morning, Paquita on a stool at Kate's knee, and when the sound of wheels came, Kate touched her and she laid her cheek for a moment against Kate's hand, then rose and went to her room. Some one came round the house and up on the porch, and I was sur-

prised enough to see Richard Allison, but when I looked at Kate I saw that she was neither surprised nor startled. Richard went straight to Kate, passing me with as much recognition as he showed to the stone pillar of the porch. He looked ghastly, like a man who had been driven and not allowed to sleep for days. Kate had risen and held out her hand to him, her manner perfectly calm.

" 'Where is she?' he asked, in a voice I had never heard from my nephew before.

" 'Here, safe with me,' Kate said.

" 'Thank God!' he said. 'I have been through hell—Kate——' She glanced from him to me, but I was already at the hall door. These were things I did not understand, and they were not meant for my hearing. My nephew talked a long time with Kate, while I sat in my room, and Paquita remained shut up in hers. Then I heard Kate go to Paquita's door, and there was the murmur of their voices, but presently Kate came out and went to her own room. Paquita's step was so light I scarcely heard it, but I knew she had come into the hall and then I heard Richard's exclamation.

"I had pieced together something of a history by that time," Aunt Silence said, "and when evening came, and Richard had gone on his way again, Kate talked a little to me, only a little, for that is like Kate, but she told me of my nephew's long acquaint-

ance with Paquita as a child and the pitiful, neglected life the girl had had. She spoke of his love for Paquita. 'It sometimes takes a fearful experience such as Richard has been through during the last few days,' Kate said, 'to teach a man to understand himself, and Richard knows now who it is he loves. He has asked Paquita to marry him, but she will give him no promise, and I think she is right. I want her to see something of people, and learn what life with a man of Richard's ambitions will mean. She is wonderfully adaptable, and quick to understand, and I know that she really loves him. That will help her more than anything else, but I mean when she does go to your nephew,' Kate said, in her quiet, final way, 'that he shall be very proud of her, and I intend that she shall not go empty-handed.'

"'You may ask me,'" Aunt Silence said, after a pause, "if I had anything to say to all this—objections to make, or suggestions to offer, or questions to ask. I had been far more astounded than I was when Kate had told me she had adopted Paquita, but I had not one word to say except in the way of acquiescence, for the simple reason that I loved Kate so very much. All the while she talked to me; when she outlined what she wished to do for Paquita—and I knew she would do all she said—her whole attitude implored me not to question her or object, only to help her if possible. The things I thought of my nephew and of Paquita,

I kept strictly to myself." Horton was leaning on the table, drinking in Mrs. Silence's words, but he did not interrupt, and she continued. "Kate closed her house in Moneta and put Underwood in charge of the place. We came down here to Los Angeles and for many months I watched a campaign, the generalship of which was marvellous. I have seen women accomplish wonderful things socially, I have seen them bring out a daughter, and engineer her into a safe harbor with the greatest skill, but I never have seen anything like Kate's triumph. There was a touch of the unusual in her relation to Paquita that caused general interest. Paquita's relationship to the Paynes, and her Spanish ancestry, were not too unduly emphasized, only enough to give a touch of romance, and it was an open secret that Kate was so thoroughly interested in the girl that she intended to make her independent. An assurance of that kind from a woman of Kate's character and wealth, means a great deal, and Paquita was given her chance.

"If I wondered at Kate, I wondered at Paquita quite as much. I don't love Paquita, but I have learned to respect her. I confess it in spite of myself. I have never known any human being that proved as quick to learn as that girl. She needed only a look, or a word, rarely that, her own observation was sufficient. She kept her eyes on Kate and those about her, and in her strange sleepy-eyed way she was really

fascinating. She had an abundance of attention, some of it serious enough, but her crowning success was with my nephew. I have seen her grow white when he entered the room, and I think her love was almost a possession, but for months he didn't know where he stood, for she held herself aloof. For once in his life Richard was driven to forget his self-absorption and his ambitions. He was a plain, selfish, determined, thoroughly humble, and not particularly admirable man, desperately in love with a girl almost young enough to be his daughter. His limitations were apparent enough, any one who had eyes could see them, and I often wondered what Kate thought of this new Richard Allison."

"And he—Mr. Allison?"

Mrs. Silence gave Horton a quick glance. "Richard respects and admires Kate—he has always done that—and I think never more than after his talk with her when he came to her for Paquita. If there is a woman whom Richard reveres and does not understand, it is Kate—but he loves Paquita. . . . He and Paquita were married at my house six weeks ago as you saw by the announcement I sent you. After that was over Kate and I went up to Moneta, and it was there she told me of her intention to go away."

Horton was silent, for a time, looking down. "I understood a good deal from your letter, I thought

it out in the night, and I understood why the announcement spoke of Paquita as the daughter of James Payne and Julietta Overa—that and some other things are plain to me—but——" He stopped and was silent again.

Mrs. Silence studied his face thoughtfully. "I understand exactly what it is you would like to know," she said, finally, "but I cannot tell you for I do not know myself." Mrs. Silence's look was very earnest as she leaned forward, her hands clasped in her lap. "For weeks I worked with Kate trying to make a place for Paquita that would be useful to her in the future, we created a social background for Richard's wife. In all that time Kate said not one word to me of herself or her feelings, not a word more than she did when she outlined to me in the beginning the things she wished to do for Paquita. The manner in which she effaced herself, and put forward a younger woman, using herself as a foil for Paquita's peculiar attractions, had all the subtlety of genius—it was wonderful! All that Kate did was quiet, quick, and effective—no fuss, no affectation. She decided on what she would do, and carried it through. I believe that Paquita's course of conduct towards my nephew throughout the last year was the result of Kate's advice. I think she stood at Paquita's elbow at every turn; I am certain of it. Just how are you to judge of a woman who has such power of will?

Only Kate Can Tell You

How can I tell you what it is she has been thinking all this long year? I can't tell you what you are longing to know—nobody can—it is only Kate herself can do that."

Horton looked steadily into Mrs. Silence's earnest eyes. "Mrs. Silence," he asked in a low voice, "is Kate happy?"

Aunt Silence moved restlessly and the color rose in her cheeks. "No," she said, abruptly, "she is not. Kate's thoughts and feelings are too carefully hidden for any acuteness of mine to discover, but I have tried to guess a few things, and I think Kate is so lonely that she is ill. It is not the sort of void an old woman like me can fill. It's that—that—has hurt me—not that Kate would not let me go with her—nothing could persuade me that Kate does not love me, but—but for her to go off alone and—and unhappy, it's that——" Aunt Silence stopped, unable to continue.

Horton looked down, and neither spoke for a time, then he said quietly, "You know, of course, that I mean to follow her. Where was she going first?"

"To Antwerp—her boat leaves on the tenth."

Horton raised his head with a jerk. "The tenth! you mean she has not sailed yet? You said she had gone to Europe——" The light began to grow in his eyes.

"Yes, but she couldn't get her boat before the tenth, and I meant——" Aunt Silence began.

"Oh, but *Aunt Silence!*" Horton cried. "This is the fifth!" He had half risen in his excitement—"And don't you *see*—if I can get the limited——" He stood up, tugging at his watch, his eyes alight now,—"I can have a whole week—with her—on the boat—she can't run away from me there—and I have only a few minutes to make it in——" He had reached Aunt Silence's side at a stride, and taking her hand kissed it. "Don't you *see,*" he cried, "I shall have to run for it!"

Aunt Silence stared for full five minutes at the doors that had swung to behind Horton's tall figure, then grown mindful of her surroundings, she turned and surveyed the room. There were more people about now, but her only immediate neighbor was an apoplectic looking old gentleman, who was gazing upon her in open-mouthed astonishment. Aunt Silence's steady attention quickly reduced him to a red and uncomfortable consideration of his plate, and she turned then and looked down very thoughtfully at the hand that had received Horton's caress. "Dear me——" she said with a gasp. "Dear me—what a man! . . . Kate, Kate!"

XIX.

IT LAY IN A LOOK

Horton had come up on deck to meet a glare of sunlight, and as he walked slowly forward, he drew his steamer-cap well down over his eyes. He had lived through the last five days in a fever of apprehension lest the precious hours of margin allowed him for catching Kate's boat should be curtailed by some highly probable delay. But his train had made its clanging entrance into New York on time. He had telegraphed ahead for a berth, but remained very doubtful of success; he was quite prepared to embark in the steerage, if good fortune would only give him the opportunity. When at the steamer office he had become the unexpected possessor of a first cabin ticket, and shortly afterwards found himself walking up the familiar incline to his floating hotel, he had uttered a profound exclamation of thankfulness. Never before had he smelled the combined odors of sea-water, white paint, and burnished brass with a sensation of more perfect content. Could his good fortune forsake him when it had brought him so far?

Twice during the afternoon he had seen a figure clad in dark blue that he had instantly recognized, but he had carefully kept his distance and contented him-

self with securing a place beside hers at the table, and sending to her stateroom a box of flowers that had made even the stewardess exclaim in surprise. He had endeavored to quiet his restlessness on the long hot journey by mentally arranging that box of flowers, and wording a telegram that delighted a New York florist. If he himself missed the boat, his flowers would be with her; the idea had pleased him.

The last faint line of land showed on the horizon in their wake, and the immensity of open ocean lay before them, its surface fretted by the stiff breeze, and touched by the sun into myriads of sparkling facets. It was not two weeks since Horton had looked upon the same scene, but he was not thinking of that as he paced slowly up and down the deck. His eyes were on two deck-chairs that were drawn apart from the others, and almost concealed behind the column of a ventilator. Earlier in the afternoon he had searched about until he had found a chair that bore the label for which he was looking. With the audacity that had characterized every act of his since the night he had pondered over Mrs. Silence's letter, he had fetched his own chair, and set the two side by side in that sheltered spot of his own choice.

The excitement of the first hours on board ship had subsided into the quiet that always follows; a realization of open ocean and a six days' continuous contemplation of it. The deck was deserted save for an

occasional stroller, and those who sought a nap in their deck chairs. Horton had waited for just this hour, and had told himself that when it came he would go straight to the muffled figure that was half hidden behind the white column, but instead he walked near and then away again many times, slowly and uncertainly. When he passed beyond that column and sat down beside her, and she lifted her veil and looked at him, would it be the look of his dreams she would give him, or the startled and unwilling glance of his remembrance. That one moment would tell the meaning of the future. He had been able during that long journey to govern his thoughts, he had done so by sheer force of will, but he had no control over his dreams. In them his fancy had roamed as it would, and created its own visions. It led him always to her side, hurrying and eager, trembling in suspense, rushing through space to reach her, and when he looked into her eyes it was a welcome that he read there, a joy that leapt into life on the instant. It had swept him along in ecstacy, flooding him with joy. He floated in an ocean of content. The visions that had followed were fragmentary, disjointed, but each a separate delight. He stood in the glaring sunshine of mid-day, with a world of water about him, but he was no longer alone, for he turned a little and she was at his side, satisfied to have him watch over her. . . . They stood at night at a

latticed casement and looked down together upon a throng that hurried by, chattering in an unfamiliar tongue, and he had drawn her into his arms and held her until the touch of her was warm against his side. The visions came and went, made vivid always by the ecstacy of love undenied. His six feverish days of hope and the nights of dreams were passed, and he stood at last with hand raised to knock on the door of happiness. Would it open to him, or must he turn away? The chill of fear had fallen upon him and a cold hand crept about his heart. He had stepped from the sunlight into the shadow of the awning that protected the row of steamer-chairs, each with its muffled form, and he stood still, overwhelmed suddenly by a sense of utter unreality. Urged by fear, he must go on to the muffled figure in its chair and have it sink to nothing under the touch of his hand. It was the dream of years ago, the impression of a moment before waking, flashed again into vivid consciousness by the glare of sunlight on white, the chill touch of shadow, and the whirr of the wind against his cheek. He had dreamed that ugly dream again, standing, a trick of nerves too long held at tension. Horton drew himself together with a gasp, and the sense of fear slowly slipped from him. The cold weight lifted from his heart, and going on he passed round the column to Kate's side.

Her head was turned so that he could see only

her profile beneath her veil. He made no attempt to disturb her, but seated himself quietly in his chair, leaning forward a little. He saw now that her eyes were closed, and he sat a long time waiting. Her ungloved hand held the rough steamer-rug from her cheek, and Horton looked at the slender fingers, pink at the tips, and at a strand of her hair that had slipped from under her veil and rested a bit of golden brown on the dark rug. He sat motionless, drinking in the delight of her nearness. Courage rose strong in him, and a confidence that clasped hands with determination.

Kate had opened her eyes now, and lay looking at the gleaming stretch of water, as it rushed toward her, and was hidden again by the regular lift and fall of the vessel. A gull flew close, a flash of white, dipping to the crest of a wave, and then the heave of the boat hid it also from view. She sighed as she drew the rug down from her cheek, and raising herself, sat upright. Conscious then of some near presence, she turned. Horton neither moved nor spoke, but a man may kneel and draw a woman's hand to his lips without need of word or motion, if the woman look deep enough into his eyes. Kate sat quite still, her eyes on his, till the slowly rising blood dyed her scarlet from brow to chin, but it crossed her face for one instant before it lost itself in amazement, the look of Horton's dreams, a swift gleam of joy, intense, vivid, unmistakable.









